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The Manuscript Poetry of Thomas St Nicholas

And the Writing of ‘Scripturalism’
in Seventeenth-Century England

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English
Literature

University of Warwick, Department of English and
Comparative Literary Studies

June 2018

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Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to record a debt of thanks to those people and institutions who have supported me during the years I have been researching and writing this thesis. I owe more than I can say to my supervisors Elizabeth Clarke and Peter Mack. Your expertise, wisdom and counsel has kept me on the right path. I have benefited from the wonderful encouragement and feedback that I have received both in Britain and across the Channel when presenting conference papers on the poetry of St Nicholas. I am grateful for the support and advice of several colleagues who enabled my research to develop and grow. My eternal gratitude to Tessa Grant, Anne Dunan-Page, Jonathan Willis, Lynn Robson, Hannah Newton, Ann Hughes, Helen Wilcox, Rachel Adcock, Sharon Achinstein, Alexandra Walsham and Vera Camden for being patient and sympathetic sources of information and insight. I am also indebted to some of these scholars for sharing the fruits of their research before that research was published.

A special mention must go to N. H. Keeble who first pointed me in the direction of St Nicholas and his fascinating poetry. I am also grateful to H. Neville Davies for discovering and transcribing the poems in St Nicholas' manuscript miscellany. Without Davies' scholarly edition of this poetry, this thesis may not have been written. My special thanks to Bernard Capp whose dazzling learning, intuition and gracious support has been a guiding light throughout.

I would also like to thank the Warwick University Librarians, The Centre for the Study of the Renaissance, The Humanities Research Centre, the English Department Administration Team, and the Heads of English Maureen Freely and Emma Mason – all of whom have gone above and beyond to help with my various inquiries. To Chris, Kate, Adam and Matt thank you for your vigilant proof-reading and suggested improvements. To my friends and family, your love and patience has made this all possible. To Mom and Dad, this is for you.

Declaration

This thesis is the sole work of Robert W. Daniel and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

This thesis examines the manuscript poems of Thomas St Nicholas (bap. 1602, d. 1668). His poetry is examined through the writing of ‘scripturalism’ in seventeenth-century England. I argue that ‘scripturalism’ was a literary trend in print and manuscript, prose and verse that shared the same scriptures to convey mutual religious, social and political values. St Nicholas’ poetry engages with, as it exemplifies, this paradigm of writing.

Chapter One investigates St Nicholas’ Civil War prison verse epistle alongside Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* (1563) and prison narratives of the seventeenth century. His poem was part of a literary culture of prison writing that used shared scenes of suffering to connect present persecutions via a Protestant past. Chapter Two explores St Nicholas’ hymn of recovery from sickness. His account of illness shares much with scriptural acts and attitudes widely performed and recorded in the early modern sick-chamber.

Chapter Three looks at the psalm paraphrases used in his prison verse. It shows St Nicholas invoking certain psalms that were widely used by other parliamentary preachers and poets to justify the war as just and righteous. Chapter Four examines St Nicholas’ battle hymn composed during the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652–1654). I demonstrate his contribution to a recognised form of parliamentary victory praise which used battle hymns to trumpet military victories using key scriptural texts and images. Chapter Five explores St Nicholas’ poem on the Great Fire of London (1666). By examining other urban fire narratives, a shared Biblicism emerges, whereby pulpiteers and balladeers were more united than divided when moralising these horrific events.

This thesis argues that St Nicholas’ poetry is evidence of a pervasive literary culture that used the Bible cross-denominationally, and occasionally cross-politically. Scripture provided a common reference for writers like him to describe both everyday and extraordinary occurrences.

Abbreviations

All abbreviations are maintained in the Bibliography.

<i>ANQ</i>	<i>A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews</i>
<i>CSPD</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers: Domestic Series</i>
<i>EEBO</i>	<i>Early English Books Online</i>
<i>EThOS</i>	<i>E-Theses Online Service</i>
<i>HLQ</i>	<i>Huntington Library Quarterly</i>
<i>HRC</i>	<i>Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas</i>
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
<i>SEL</i>	<i>Studies in English Literature</i>
<i>Vacant Hours</i>	<i>At Vacant Hours: Poems By Thomas St Nicholas and His Family.</i> Ed. by H. Neville Davies (Birmingham: Birmingham UP, 2002)

Note on the Text

Old spellings have been preserved in quotations. The letters i/j, vv/w and u/v, however, have been silently amended.

INTRODUCTION

If, as Brian Cummings has argued, English Protestantism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could not ‘be separated from writing’, it was the Bible that was undoubtedly most written about.¹ Such statements would hardly be contested.² Contemporary English theologians like Samuel Gibson, echoing the Great Tew writer William Chillingworth, held to the ardent belief that ‘our religion is in the Bible; there is our God’.³ Gibson was probably referring to the King James Version, the most widely read and quoted during the seventeenth century.⁴ The power of God’s Word, however, was not bound to any one translation. Reformation luminaries like Thomas Becon had affirmed the all-sufficiency of scripture in any and every translation almost a century earlier.⁵

This created a robust Biblicism which ensured, as Patrick Collinson has observed, that the people of early modern England were ‘living, in a sense, in the pages of the Bible’.⁶ As Johanna Harris has shown, scripture during this period was a ‘living

¹ Brian Cummings, *Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), p. 6.

² The importance of the interpretive power of the Bible in England has been well documented. Cf., David Norton, *A History of the Bible as Literature*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000); David S. Katz, *God’s Last Words: Reading the English Bible from the Reformation to Fundamentalism* (New Haven; London: Yale UP, 2004); Ariel Hessayon and Nicholas Keene, eds., *Scripture and Scholarship in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Kevin Killeen, *The Political Bible in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2017).

³ Samuel Gibson, *The Ruin of the Authors and Fomentors of Civil Wars* (London: 1645), p. 25. Chillingworth famously wrote, ‘The Bible, I say, The Bible only is the Religion of Protestants!’ (William Chillingworth, *The religion of protestants* (London: 1638), p. 379). This Biblicism had its early opponents. This was the case when Richard Cholmeley’s Players performed the play *Saint Christopher* (1607) for the Catholic Sir John and Lady Julian Yorke in Gouthwaite Hall, near Ramsgill, in the winter of 1609. Inserting an improvised piece into the performance, for the amusement of their recusant audience, the players figured a Church of England minister who had ‘under his arme... a booke like Bible’, and being asked ‘how he could defend his religion’, he answered, ‘By this book’. Offering to ‘shew it forth’, the Bible ‘was rejected’, and the said English minister ‘carried away by the devill’ (qtd. in Adam Fox, ‘Religious Satire in English Towns, 1570–1640’, in *The Reformation in English Towns, 1500–1640*, ed. by Patrick Collinson and John Craig (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 221–240 (pp. 230–231)).

⁴ For the popularity of the Authorized Version see Helen Wilcox, ‘The King James Bible in its Cultural Moment’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c. 1530–1700*, ed. by Kevin Killeen, Helen Smith and Rachel Willie (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), pp. 455–468. Scholars have, however, argued for the continued influence of the Geneva Bible. Cf., Crawford Gribbon, ‘Deconstructing the Geneva Bible: The Search for a Puritan Poetic’, *Literature and Theology* 14.1 (March 2000), pp. 1–16; Elizabeth Clarke, *Politics, Religion and the Song of Songs in Seventeenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 106–107, p. 130; Femke Molekamp, *Women and the Bible in Early Modern England: Religious Reading and Writing* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), pp. 19–50.

⁵ Cf., Thomas Becon, *Works* (London: 1563), p. 469; Norton, *Bible as Literature*, I, pp. 142–143.

⁶ Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 10.

text’ (both a material notion and a theological “truth”).⁷ The Bible was not just recited during church services, for scripture was a part of the vocabulary of English life. Scriptural songs were sung at work, at wedding feasts, in the streets, at home, at the scaffold and on the battlefield.⁸ God’s Word was preached in courtyards, in the fields, in prisons, on ships, in alehouses and in Parliament.⁹ It was debated by neighbours, drilled into servants, taught to children and recognised (if not partially memorised) by almost everyone.¹⁰ Though literacy rates were relatively low by modern standards¹¹, those who were taught to read started with the Bible.¹² This Bible reading created a great deal of biblical writing.¹³

Thomas St Nicholas

The literary culture of the Bible in England can be seen to have directly influenced the manuscript verse of the Kent-born lawyer Thomas St Nicholas (bap. 1602, d. 1668). His compositions are significant for what they reveal about the religious, political and

⁷ Johanna Harris, ‘Lucy Robartes’ “A meditation upon the Lords day”: A Puritan Palimpsest and English Sabbatarianism’, *The Seventeenth Century*, 23.1 (2008), pp. 1-33 (p. 4).

⁸ Cf., Jonathan Willis, *Church Music and Protestantism in Post-Reformation England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 205-239.

⁹ Cf., Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), pp. 229-291; Eric Josef Carlson, ‘The Boring of the Ear: Shaping the Pastoral Vision of Preaching in England, 1540–1640’, in *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period*, ed. by Larissa Taylor (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001), pp. 249-296; Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), pp. 236-240.

¹⁰ Cf., Ian Green, ‘Varieties of Domestic Devotion in Early Modern English Protestantism’, in *Private and Domestic Devotion in Early Modern Britain*, ed. by Jessica Martin and Alec Ryrie (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 9-32; Andrew Cambers, *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), pp. 151-153; Alexandra Walsham, ‘Domesticating the Reformation: Material Culture, Memory and Confessional Identity in Early Modern England’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 69.1 (2016), pp. 566-616.

¹¹ Yet literacy rates alone do not tell the whole story. As Molekamp argues, ‘precise figures for [biblical] literacy rates during this period are ‘problematic since the term “literate” cannot yield a single meaning’. Reading was ‘taught before writing’ and so a poorer education may cover the first, but not the second, stage of literacy. ‘Readers’ of the Bible therefore, Molekamp argues, came to the scriptures with ‘varying reading abilities. Some readers could annotate, some could not. Some might be more fluent in one typeface than another. Some, less literate, were purely “aural” readers – relying on more educated others to read the Bible to them’ (Molekamp, *Women and the Bible*, pp. 26-27).

¹² Cf., Cambers, *Godly Reading*, pp. 151-152; Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England: Gender and Self-Definition in an Emergent Writing Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 19-50; Kenneth Charlton, *Women, Religion and Education in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 78-83, pp. 142-153.

¹³ Cf., Margaret Spufford, ‘First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Spiritual Autobiographers’, *Social History*, 4.3 (October 1979), pp. 407-435 (p. 411). Kevin Killeen and Helen Smith, “‘All other Bookes... are but Notes upon this’: The Early Modern Bible”, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c. 1530–1700*, ed. by Killeen, Smith and Willie, pp. 1-16.

literary values of English Bible readers and their biblical writings. St Nicholas was a keen reader of God's Word. As he tersely advised his eldest son, Thomas St Nicholas (1637–1671), 'Let scriptures guide in every case./Search them'.¹⁴ To him, the Bible was the plumb-line by which life itself was measured. He counselled not just kin, but kirk, to do the same. To his 'brethren in the bands/O'the gospel' he admonished,

Let not vain words of men deceive you,
That would of precious truths bereave you.
Slight not on finest spun pretence
The good old way in scripture sense.¹⁵

Every decision St Nicholas made was premised on God's Word, whereby he asserted,

Upon true knowledge... that's only grounded
On sacred scriptures; and from thence we learn
The root of saving wisdom to discern.¹⁶

How did St Nicholas' life shape his 'scripture sense'?¹⁷ In 1602 he was baptized near Sandwich, Kent, the eldest son and fourth child of Thomas St Nicholas (1567–1626) and Dorothy (1578–1605), daughter of William Tilghman of Snodland, near Rochester, in the same county. After a rigorous education, he graduated from Emmanuel College, Cambridge whose religious zeal followed him.¹⁸ From Cambridge, he proceeded to the Inner Temple in 1624. However, when he was admitted to the bar

¹⁴ Thomas St Nicholas, *My Ultimum Vale* (1668), lines 70-71, in *At Vacant Hours: Poems By Thomas St Nicholas and His Family*, ed. by H. Neville Davies (Birmingham: Birmingham UP, 2002), p. 168. All subsequent references to St Nicholas' poetry are taken from this edition.

¹⁵ St Nicholas, *My Ultimum Vale* (1668), lines 303-306, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 173.

¹⁶ Thomas St Nicholas, 'The Recreation of an Accountant... 1662' (1663), lines 442-444, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 58.

¹⁷ Some of what follows is taken from the brief but informative article: H. Neville Davies, 'St Nicholas, Thomas (bap. 1602, d. 1668)', *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2006; online edn, May 2015.

¹⁸ The godly education and community fostered at Emmanuel was not endemic to all university colleges during this period. As Johanna Harris points out, despite a 'deep regard for the universities', the godly expressed concern 'about an established church consensus that appeared to be diminishing the evangelical priorities of the universities', not only to 'educate in divinity (and to provide the basic qualification for ministry)' but also to 'nurture reformed Protestant fervour in graduates for the benefit of the Commonwealth, for clerical and civic godly character' (Johanna Harris, "'Be plyeabell to all good Counsell": Lady Brilliana Harley's advice letter to her son', in *Women and Epistolary Agency in Early Modern Culture, 1540–1690*, ed. by James Daybell and Andrew Gordon (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 128-147 (p. 128)).

the following year, St Nicholas chose to invest in the iron industry rather than pursue a career in paid advocacy. His religious fervour seems to have crystallised during the English Civil Wars (1642–1648). His upbringing ensured that he took up arms for the parliamentary cause. During this period he was deeply enmeshed in godly circles. Oliver Cromwell addressed him as a ‘noble Friend’ in a letter of 1648, and he was related to the deeply pious Purefoy and Greville families of Warwickshire.¹⁹ His brother, the clergyman John St Nicholas (b. 1604, d. 1699), is likely to have translated William Ames’ bestselling devotional treatise *Medulla Theologiae* (1627) into English entitled *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (1642).²⁰

After the Roundheads had defeated the Royalists and beheaded Charles I on 30 January 1649, St Nicholas became a significant part of the Commonwealth government. His responsibilities included: steward of the court of chancery and admiralty of the Cinque Ports; steward of the liberty of St Augustine, Canterbury; and the recorderships of Canterbury and Sandwich; assessing maintenance contributions for the military and naval forces of the Commonwealth; approving public preachers and ejecting unacceptable ministers and schoolmasters; and the work of the committee for compounding.²¹ St Nicholas sat as a member for Yorkshire in the short lived Barebones Parliament (July–December 1653), and, after failing to secure a seat in the first Parliament of the Protectorate (1654–1655), returned to the second Parliament of the Protectorate (1656–1658) as a member for Canterbury.²²

Yet St Nicholas was not a straightforward political radical of the 1640s and 1650s. Where he had strong opinions, he was not afraid to voice them. His views were always premised on firm convictions which he felt were grounded in legal precedents rather than personal politics. Much can be gleaned about his character from the parliamentary speeches he made whilst an M.P. for Canterbury.²³ He was supportive of the release of the Baptist turned Leveller Richard Overton from his prison on the Isle of

¹⁹ For Cromwell’s letter to St Nicholas, see Davies, ‘Introduction’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. xxiv–v. For St Nicholas’ connection to the Purefoy’s and Greville’s, see Davies, ‘Commentary’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 229, p. 319.

²⁰ For John St Nicholas’ possible authorship of Ames’ treatise, see Davies ‘Commentary’, in *Vacant Hours*, p. 320. *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* had at least two editions during the 1640s.

²¹ Davies, ‘St Nicholas, Thomas (bap. 1602, d. 1668)’, *ODNB*.

²² St Nicholas’ political career at Westminster continued right up until March 1660. Cf., Davies, ‘Introduction’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. xxx.

²³ These can be gleaned from the excerpts recorded in Thomas Burton, *Diary of Thomas Burton*, ed. by John Towill Rutt (London: 1828), 4 vols.

Jersey, because Overton's crime had been 'unspecified'.²⁴ After Oliver Cromwell's death on 3 September 1658, St Nicholas was not afraid to defend the liberties of Richard Cromwell's short-lived third Parliament of the Protectorate (January 1659–April 1659). In a speech he refused to let 'the faith I have sworn to the Protector' supersede his duty to uphold 'the liberty of the people'.²⁵ Amidst the uneasy sitting of the reinstated Rump Parliament (May 1659–February 1660),²⁶ St Nicholas was an advocate for a fairer, more transparent and democratic parliamentary system. He argued that borough seats 'shall not be hereditary' otherwise 'several parties would trade together' to enact laws that were in their own and not the peoples' best interest.²⁷

Despite his enlightened principles, St Nicholas could be fiercely partisan to those Royalists who changed sides after the Civil War. He was particularly vocal in the prosecution of Edmund Jones, Cromwell's Attorney-General for Wales. Jones had found favour with the Protector in being a Royalist turncoat, but had lost his patronage and purpose after Cromwell's death. When some members of the Commons defended Jones' past, arguing that he had never actually fought in the war, St Nicholas called for his dismissal, trenchantly claiming '[m]any men have done you [Parliament] more harm with their heads and pen, than with their swords'.²⁸ Yet by late 1659 the tables had turned. St Nicholas could identify with the sentiment of one of his fellow M.P.s that 'I know not what will become of us [Parliament]'.²⁹ The Restoration of Charles II in 1660 saw an end to St Nicholas' brief but active political career.

By the mid 1660s he was derisively referred to as that 'old parliament dog'.³⁰ He decided to retreat from public life, though he was not free from controversy. In 1663 he was accused of embezzling funds (£80,000) he had received as one of the Northern Association Army's principal accountants during the years 1645–1649.³¹ Though he was eventually acquitted, he grew increasingly disillusioned with what he

²⁴ Burton, *Diary*, III, p. 45. St Nicholas' pleas may not have been successful, but Overton was released shortly after the Restoration. By 1662 he was living in Kennington. Cf., B. J. Gibbons, 'Overton, Richard (fl. 1640–1663)', *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, May 2010.

²⁵ Burton, *Diary*, ed. by Rutt, III, p. 118.

²⁶ These dates cover the turbulent sitting of the Rump Parliament. It was reinstated in May 1659, but was expelled again (by General Lambert and the army) in October 1659, only to be re-reinstated once more in December 1659. In February 1660, the old M.P.s barred by Pride's Purge (December 1648) were allowed to resume their places. This paved the way for the Convention in April 1660, which in turn paved the way for Charles II's return and the sitting of his Cavalier Parliament.

²⁷ Burton, *Diary*, ed. by Rutt, III, p. 579.

²⁸ Burton, *Diary*, ed. by Rutt, III, p. 240.

²⁹ Burton, *Diary*, ed. by Rutt, III, p. 544.

³⁰ Thomas St Nicholas, 'An Officer of Dover Castle' (1667), title, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 144.

³¹ Davies, 'Commentary', in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 283.

saw a dissolute and sinful age rife with ‘cheats’, ‘coz’nings’ and ‘oppressions... In ev’ry trade, in all professions’.³² He criticised the exhumation and post-mortem hanging of the body of ‘napping, Oliver [Cromwell]’ in January 1661.³³ St Nicholas was also critical of what he saw as the failings of the Cavalier Parliament (1661–1679) and especially those of Charles II’s rule. When the Great Plague hit the country in 1665 he compared it to the biblical plague in 2 Samuel 24 that ‘brought so sore a desolation/Because of [King] David’s provocation’.³⁴ St Nicholas must have felt the bitter irony of having witnessed the rise and fall of the rule of the saints. He died in 1668 of muscular palsy and thus never lived to see the Glorious Revolution of 1688.³⁵

St Nicholas’ religion informed his politics. Much of his verse reveals him to be an ardent Independent. This meant that he did not conform to the rituals of the Church of England. After the Restoration, he and other dissenters (Baptists, Quakers, Presbyterians) were heavily penalised and persecuted for their religious nonconformity. St Nicholas worshipped in secret conventicles and refused to accept the Book of Common Prayer (hereafter BCP) as appropriate for church services. In 1664 a suit was brought against him in the Consistory Court of Canterbury for refusing to have his ‘poor old nurse’ buried according to the rubric of the BCP.³⁶ He railed upon the ungodliness of the ‘steeple-monger’s trade’ and plural church livings, and escaped arrest when authorities (armed with ‘frightful blunderbushes [blunderbusses]’) raided a conventicle he was attending at a ‘private house’ in Kent in 1663.³⁷

What makes St Nicholas’ manuscript poems so engaging is that his ‘scripture sense’ did not stop him drawing from the writings of other thinkers (Laudians, Levellers, Royalists). By invoking similar devotional passages to these groups, St Nicholas was able to see beyond various affiliations and loyalties. He could use certain

³² Thomas St Nicholas, ‘Micah 6.9; The Voice of the Rod, 1665’, lines 183-184, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 108.

³³ Thomas St Nicholas, ‘Upon the Translation of the Body of O[liver] C[romwell] from H[enry] VII’s Chapel to Tyburn’ (unknown), line 1, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 135. It is entirely unclear whether St Nicholas wrote this latter poem in the days immediately following Cromwell’s exhumation or as a later reflection. Cf., Davies, ‘Commentary’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 411.

³⁴ St Nicholas, ‘Micah 6.9; The Voice of the Rod, 1665’, line 355-6, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 112.

³⁵ Cf., Thomas St Nicholas, ‘Upon My Shaking Palsy’ (1667–1668), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 163-164. For an examination of the religious freedom brought about by the ‘bloodless revolution’, see John Miller, *The Glorious Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2014), *passim*.

³⁶ Thomas St Nicholas, ‘Upon Mr Benchkin, the Curate of Ash... 1664’, line 29, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 100.

³⁷ Thomas St Nicholas, ‘God Speed the Plough’ (1663), line 45, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 87; Thomas St Nicholas, ‘Upon the Imprisonment of Mr Charles Nichols... For Preaching at a Private House’ (1663), line 23, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 93.

scriptures as a short hand that signalled his participation in a biblical literary culture. This culture was as popular as it was prolific. As we shall see, it was practised by not just English writers, but by some Scottish and Welsh authors too.

It should be noted that this thesis is not intended to be a biography of St Nicholas. Though several of these chapters cover key moments in his life from the 1640s–1660s (imprisonment, illness, national celebrations and private reflections) they are merely snapshots of the much wider and varied life that he lived. This thesis does not explore the contrapuntal rhythms of that life; those moments where he escaped death by the sword, drowning, plague and falling off his horse.³⁸ Instead, this present study aims to bring greater attention to his poetic work as indicative of important (and until now relatively unknown) literary forms composed during early modern England.

The Writing of ‘Scripturalism’

What terms could be used to describe the immense influence the Bible exerted on the writing life of men like St Nicholas? A clue lies in Arthur Dent’s bestselling spiritual guide, composed at the dawn of the seventeenth century, entitled *Plaine Mans Path-way to Heaven* (1601).³⁹ Framed in the dialogue tradition, Dent has one of his characters Antilegon (or the ‘sceptic’) rail against Bible-readers as ‘these Scripture men’ that ‘are all of the spirit: you are so full of it, that it runneth out at your nostrils’.⁴⁰ Dent’s depiction of English Biblicism was a simple one. For English Protestants could be identified and were to evidence their faith not just by reading scripture but by writing, speaking, gesturing and even by their exhaling of it – through their ‘nostrils’. In short, it ‘runneth out’ of every aspect of their lives. This saturation persisted. Some forty years later the Presbyterian and army chaplain Simeon Ashe preached before Parliament that they should be ‘Scripture men’ by the authority whereof ‘all doubts and differences should be determined’.⁴¹ Ashe was not just asking M.P.s to all read the Bible, but to all read it in the same way. He, like many authors before and after him, saw the potential

³⁸ Cf., St Nicholas, ‘The Recreation of an Accountant... 1662’ (1663), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 48–61; Thomas St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn Of Praise Occasioned by... Deliverance... from... an Extraordinary Sudden Flood... 1663’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 66–70; St Nicholas, ‘Micah 6.9; The Voice of the Rod, 1665’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 104–121; Thomas St Nicholas, ‘Upon a Fall from an Horse’ (1648), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 43.

³⁹ This work went into more than 27 editions between 1601–82.

⁴⁰ Arthur Dent, *Plaine Mans Path-way to Heaven* (London: 1601), p. 300.

⁴¹ Simeon Ashe, *The best refuge for the most oppressed* (London: 1642), p. 62.

for God's Word to create unity amongst a diverse group of people.⁴² The problem that has faced several scholars, then as now, is what to call the similar biblical writings of such 'Scripture-men' and women.

The answer lies in two little-known, and until very recently, unused terms. 'Scripturalism' is a 'doctrine or belief that scripture is the sole authority for faith and religious practice' (OED). It was first used by nineteenth-century scholars to describe radical reformers who wrote after the Reformation.⁴³ Its derivative, a 'scripturalist', is a person 'who is knowledgeable about or well read in scripture' (OED).⁴⁴ Thus a 'scripturalist' is one who practises 'scripturalism'. With some exceptions, these two terms have been greatly neglected by modern criticism.

Daniel W. Doerksen uses 'scripturalist' to describe the ecclesiastical moderation in John Donne's 'word-centred' *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624).⁴⁵ Doerksen uses Donne's reading of the Bible to argue against Richard Strier's claim that the *Devotions* represented an 'Arminian polemic'.⁴⁶ Instead, Doerksen's conception of Donne as a 'scripturalist' is tied to the emerging doctrinal theory of the English 'middle-way' amongst early modern literary scholars and historians.⁴⁷ Similarly, Kate Narveson applies 'scripturalist' to other devotional works by various lay authors to dispel the assumed 'division between elite and popular religious culture' as well as between 'puritan and conformist piety'.⁴⁸ Both Doerksen and Narveson use the term

⁴² This strategy was not always shared or successful. Meanings of certain scriptures were hotly contested and debated in early modern England. One person's true reading of scripture could be another's heresy. For excellent discussions on the multiple interpretations of the same scriptural passages during this period, see Blair Worden, *God's Instruments: Political Conduct in the England of Oliver Cromwell* (Oxford: Oxford, 2012), pp. 13-32; Sharon Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton; Chichester: Princeton UP, 1994), pp. 83-88.

⁴³ 1., 'scripturalism, n.', *OED*, online edn, 2016.

⁴⁴ 2., 'scripturalist, n.†', *OED*, online edn, 2016.

⁴⁵ Daniel W. Doerksen, 'Discerning God's Voice, God's Hand: Scripturalist Moderation in Donne's *Devotions*', in *Centered on the Word: Literature, Scripture, and the Tudor-Stuart Middle Way*, ed. by Daniel W. Doerksen and Christopher Hodgkins (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp. 148-172.

⁴⁶ Doerksen, 'Scripturalist Moderation', in *Centered on the Word*, ed. by Doerksen and Hodgkins, p. 149.

⁴⁷ Bernard Capp, *England's Culture Wars: Puritan Reformation and Its Enemies in the Interregnum, 1649-1660* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), p. 4; Tara Hamling, 'Old Robert's Girdle: Visual and Material Props for Protestant Piety in Post-Reformation England', in *Private and Domestic Devotion*, ed. by Martin and Ryrrie, pp. 135-164 (p. 155). For early proponents of an English 'middle way', see Timothy Hall Breen, 'The Non-Existent Controversy: Puritan and Anglican Attitudes on Work and Wealth, 1600-1640', *Church History*, 35 (1966), pp. 273-287; Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979), p. 434, n. 61; Peter Lake, 'Joseph Hall, Robert Skinner and the Rhetoric of Moderation at the Early Stuart Court', in *The English Sermon Revised: Religion, Literature and History 1600-1750*, ed. by Lori Anne Ferrell and Peter McCullough (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), pp. 167-185.

⁴⁸ Narveson, *Bible Readers*, pp. 101-130.

‘scripturalist’ (although not ‘scripturalism’) in a non-literal sense to encompass not just the Bible (Geneva and Authorized) but to other devotional works that assumed a scriptural authority (sermons, treatises, martyrologies and spiritual manuals). This is why neither Doerksen nor Narveson capitalise their use of ‘scripturalist’ – and nor will I.⁴⁹

Doerksen’s and Narveson’s work is important as both see moderate English Calvinism at the centre, as well, arguably, as at the margins, of people’s beliefs from the reign of Elizabeth I onwards. Such a trend abolishes the unhelpful binaries of ‘Anglican’ versus ‘Puritan’, or the more recently coined labels of ‘Conformist’ versus ‘Reformist’. Rather it shows that ruling Church authorities and the ‘hotter sort’ of Protestants shared much in common scripturally, albeit not sacramentally or doctrinally, in their sacred reading and writing.⁵⁰ Representative of consensus more than conflict, the writing of ‘scripturalism’ provides a much needed reconsideration of religious, political and literary values during the Tudor and Stuart eras.⁵¹

I have chosen to use these two terms in this thesis to discuss a literary culture that St Nicholas and other early modern writers were engaging in. This literary culture employed similar biblical as well as devotional passages, tropes, idioms and allusions. I see ‘scripturalist’ authors (and the ‘scripturalism’ they propagated through their writings) as walking a fine line between two approaches to religious writing and reading. On the one hand, such writers embraced a vocabulary that seemingly elided selfhood by speaking through scripture. Like Lady Alice Wandesford, Alice Thornton’s mother, they were described as often,

⁴⁹ To clarify, I use ‘scripturalism’ and ‘scripturalist’ as terms to refer to writing that did not just quote from the Bible but also from other devotional texts in print. It should be noted that quotation marks for ‘scripturalism’ and ‘scripturalist’ are maintained throughout the Introduction only. The quotation marks are then dropped whenever these two terms are used throughout the thesis.

⁵⁰ Charles W. A. Prior, *Defining the Jacobean Church: The Politics of Religious Controversy, 1603–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), pp. 1–21; Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God’s Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), pp. 3–22; John F. H. New, *Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of their Opposition, 1558–1640* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 1964), pp. 5–29. For the new wave of criticism which sees continuities, rather than the discordances, between these two denominations see Andrew Cambers and Michelle Wolfe, ‘Reading, Family Religion, and Evangelical Identity in Late Stuart England’, *The Historical Journal*, 47.4 (December 2004), pp. 875–896.

⁵¹ Catherine Gimelli Martin, *Milton Among the Puritans: The Case for Historical Revisionism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 1–27. Also cf., Ann Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), p. 11; Anne Dunan-Page, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, ed. by Anne Dunan-Page (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), pp. 1–10 (p. 7).

speaking to God in his own phrase and word, saying that we could not speak to him from ourselves in such an acceptable a manner, as by that which was dictated by his own most holy spirit.⁵²

As Andrew Bradstock has recently pointed out, such ‘religious verbiage’ was ubiquitous, even amongst those who purported to burn their Bibles.⁵³ Similar arguments could be made for the poorer, ‘rude’, and lower orders of English society.⁵⁴ On the other hand, this did not mean that ‘scripturalists’ could not hypostatize *sola scriptura* – that is to say, write accounts that revealed God’s Word as rooted in their own experiences.⁵⁵ English Calvinism was above all ‘experimental’ (experiential): the meaning of everyday events was validated (rather than just inspired) by a reading of the Bible.⁵⁶ Like Katharine Evans’ and Sarah Cheevers’ *A Short Relation of Cruel Sufferings* (1662) many ‘scripturalists’ were able to confidently say:

whatsoever I have written, it is not because it is recorded in the scripture, or that I have heard of such things. But in obedience to the Lord I have written the things which I did hear, see, tasted and handled of the good word of God, to the praise of his name for ever.⁵⁷

⁵² Alice Thornton, ‘A Book of Remembrances’, in *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen*, ed. by Elspeth Graham and others (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 145-162 (p. 153).

⁵³ Andrew Bradstock, ‘Digging, Levelling, and Ranting: The Bible and the Civil War Sects’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c. 1530–1700*, ed. by Killeen, Smith and Willie, pp. 398-409 (p. 409). Also cf., Gilbert Roulston, *The ranters bible* (London: 1650), pp. 1-6.

⁵⁴ Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), pp. 93-96.

⁵⁵ Nevada Levi DeLapp argues that a commitment to *sola scriptura* was ‘common coin among the various strains of the Reformation. Protestants of all kinds held that the Bible functioned as the final authority in matters of faith and doctrine’. DeLapp adds that, ‘Tradition, reason, and experience were all important, but in the end, scripture was the chief and final arbiter’ (Nevada Levi DeLapp, *The Reformed David(s) and the Question of Resistance to Tyranny: Reading the Bible in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), p. 166, n. 4).

⁵⁶ For a recent critical overview of the current scholarship on ‘experimental Calvinism’ in England, see Randall J. Pederson, *Unity in Diversity: English Puritans and the Puritan Reformation, 1603–1689* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014), pp. 7-8. The term appears to have originated with R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979). Some ‘hotter sort’ of English Protestants took this notion to extremes and argued that the Bible was written ‘experimentally’, and therefore did not require the learned explication of preachers. The Digger leader Gerrard Winstanley wrote, ‘The Scriptures of the Bible were written by the experimentall hand of Shepherds, Husbandmen, Fishermen, and such inferiour men of the world; And the Universitie learned ones have got these mens writings; and flourish[e]s their plaine language over with their darke interpretation, and glosses, as if it were too hard for ordinary men now to understand them; and thereby th[e]y deceive the simple’ (Gerrard Winstanley, *Fire in the bush* (London: 1650), p. 40).

⁵⁷ Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, ‘A Short Relation of Cruel Sufferings’, in *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Graham and others, pp. 115-128 (p. 121).

Communicating a devotion to God's Word in writing was an imperative and almost obligatory act. As the Presbyterian divine Isaac Ambrose argued in his popular treatise *Media, or the Middle Things* (1649) a love 'to his [God's] Word' was one of the primary 'signs' of election – and thus salvation.⁵⁸ As Narveson has shown, to write and cite the Bible not only provided a 'divine warrant, but a divine origin' for an author's words.⁵⁹ This proved particularly irresistible and empowering to lay Protestants.⁶⁰ It created a culture of reading and writing that walked a tightrope between doctrinal and experiential, canonical and conversational, communal and idiosyncratic expressions. It is in this way that my use of 'scripturalist', and the literary culture of 'scripturalism' that it produced, is to be seen.

Although 'scripturalism' – with its connotations of a strict Biblicism – could be used as a by-word for 'puritanism', this is not my intention.⁶¹ The definition of 'puritanism' and 'puritan' continues to be contested by scholars and as a result these are terms I will avoid using.⁶² Not only St Nicholas, but many of the writers I cite alongside him, could be considered 'puritan', such as Mary Penington, Mary Rich, Edmund Calamy, George Wither, Richard Baxter, Oliver Heywood and John Lilburne. Yet some would not, such as Lancelot Andrewes, Jeremy Taylor, Alice Thornton and

⁵⁸ Isaac Ambrose, *Media, or the Middle Things* (London: 1649), p. 134. This work saw ten more editions between 1649–1689. Also see William Perkins, *A golden chaine* (5th edn., Cambridge: 1600), pp. 113–114; Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Living* (London: 1650), pp. 34–36.

⁵⁹ Narveson, *Bible Readers*, p. 98.

⁶⁰ Cf., Narveson, *Bible Readers*, passim.

⁶¹ For the link between puritans and Bible reading, see Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Virginia: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), passim; Andrew Cambers, 'Reading, the Godly, and Self-Writing in England, circa 1580–1720', *Journal of British Studies*, 46.4 (2007), pp. 796–825 (especially p. 802). Such notions are contested by David Cressy in *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), pp. 72–75; James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor, 'Introduction: The Practice and Representation of Reading in England', in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. by James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), pp. 1–21.

⁶² Cf., Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), pp. 300–302; Peter Lake, 'The Historiography of Puritanism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. by John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), pp. 346–371. The constant debate about 'puritanism' has ensured, as Charles Lloyd Cohen commented some years ago (making a wry pun on Ecclesiastes 12.12), that of the 'making [of] many books on Puritans there is no end' (Cohen, *God's Caress*, p. 3). For similar reasons I do not use the term 'Anglican' or Anglicanism'. Instead I use the term 'high churchmen', which I see as synonymous with 'episcopal clergy' and 'Established Church divines'. As W. R. Fryer explains, although the term 'high churchmen' is, like the term 'Anglican', an anachronism, it is more appropriate when discussing the 'great Caroline divines' who shared 'a unity of tendency', though 'not an agreement in detail', towards the beautification of church architecture and an emphasis on church ceremonies (W. R. Fryer, 'The "high churchmen" of the earlier seventeenth century', *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 5.1 (2009), pp. 106–148 (pp. 109–110)).

William Barton. My use of ‘scripturalism’, then, encompasses a gamut of authors who were both within and without the Church of England; from episcopal clergy to nonconformist ministers, from loyal church attendants to lay Independent worshippers. For this reason, I have engaged with scholarship on Laudianism and Royalism as well as on Puritanism.

Though my definition of a ‘scripturalist’ is religiously very broad, its literary expressions are specific. I examine the same passages of scripture being used by St Nicholas and other authors for precise acts of recorded piety: sick-bed covenants; prison devotions; Thanksgiving Day battle hymns; psalm singing and psalm collages; and writings on the providence of and compunction expressed after urban fires. I examine how ‘scripturalists’ like St Nicholas engaged with popular devotional texts such as John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, Lancelot Andrewes’ *A Manual of Directions for the Sick*, Edmund Calamy’s *The Souldiers Pocket Bible*, Francis Rous’ *The Psalms of David*, George Wither’s *The British Appeals* and the Church of England’s BCP. Such a study answers the renewed calls for fresh investigations into the importance of the Bible and devotional literature on early modern reading and writing habits.⁶³

‘Scripturalists’ like St Nicholas are not presented here, like Shakespeare’s Falstaff, using the Bible to defend their hypocrisy and vice.⁶⁴ This thesis is not about radical religion and its literary by-products, nor is it about those who Christopher Hill called ‘Antiscripturists’.⁶⁵ This thesis is also not about how and why the same scriptures were hotly contested and debated amongst various denominational groups.⁶⁶ Rather, it is focused on the doctrinal and practical common ground (willingly or reluctantly) agreed upon by many seventeenth-century writers. Though it is also difficult to know exactly what part the lower orders of English society played in such a consensus, I have attempted to keep the material I examine broad in its scope. From

⁶³ Johanna Harris and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, ‘Introduction’, in *The Intellectual Culture of Puritan Women, 1558–1680*, ed. by Johanna Harris and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1–14 (p. 6). Also cf., Nicholas Tyacke, ‘The Legalizing of Dissent, 1571–1719’, in *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England*, ed. by Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan I. Israel and Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 15–27.

⁶⁴ Kristen Poole, *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), pp. 16–44.

⁶⁵ Hill, *The English Bible*, p. 237.

⁶⁶ For discussions on doctrinal and confessional disputes over the same scriptural passages during this period, see Alison Searle, ‘Interpreting the event: baptism, networks and polemic in Commonwealth England’, *The Seventeenth Century*, 10.2 (2017), pp. 1–17; Nicholas Hardy, *Criticism and Confession: The Bible in the Seventeenth Century Republic of Letters* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017), pp. 308–370.

accounts by men and women, young and old, lay and clerical, high and low churchmen, Royalist or Roundhead, in manuscript and print, I show ‘scripturalist’ writing to have transcended gender, age, class, politics, and frequently media.⁶⁷

I have chosen to use the terms ‘godly’ and ‘saints’ as synonymous with ‘scripturalist’ writing and those who practised the writing of ‘scripturalism’. This is not just because many of the writers I will examine here thought of themselves in this way, (unless explicitly stated otherwise), but that these terms seem appropriate to the kind of ‘scripturalist’ reading and writing that sought to live out God’s Word as a model for others to follow. I am conscious, however, of being ensnared in the trap which, as Peter Lake cautions, is to ‘start playing “definitions”’ and to seek ‘an evidential base’ for my preferred view.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, my ‘catch-all’ terminology is a response to recent scholarship that has shown how religious writing (and the religion of authors) was very rarely, if ever, clear cut.⁶⁹ As a result, my definition of ‘scripturalist/scripturalism’ is neither watertight nor contemporary to the writers I examine, but rather a useful term when discussing the literary output of men like St Nicholas.

The Manuscript Poems of Thomas St Nicholas

During the seventeenth century, manuscript writing, particularly religious verse from a minor male poet, remained very important. Work of this nature has received insufficient attention from literary scholars.⁷⁰ Much study of manuscripts revolves around the writing of early modern women.⁷¹ The manuscript verse of Thomas St

⁶⁷ I acknowledge, as David Underdown has done, that ‘Historians are the prisoners of their own sources. We find only what is in our documents, and we may reasonably suspect that this will sometimes lead to distortion’ (David Underdown, *Fire from Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2003), p. 130).

⁶⁸ Peter Lake, ‘Anti-Puritanism: The Structure of a Prejudice’, in *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tyacke*, ed. by Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), pp. 80-97 (p. 87). Indeed, Lake does use the term ‘ultra-scripturalism’ to refer to the activities of the Anabaptists, which he argues were associated with puritanical Biblicism more generally, in Elizabethan England. Cf., Peter Lake, ‘Post-Reformation Politics, or on Not Looking for the Long-Term Causes of the English Civil War’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the English Revolution*, ed. by Michael J. Braddick (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), pp. 22-40 (p. 24).

⁶⁹ Peter Lake, ‘Introduction: Puritanism, Arminianism, and Nicholas Tyacke’, in *Religious Politics*, ed. by Fincham and Lake, pp. 1-15; Alexandra Walsham, ‘Afterword’, in *Sin and Salvation in Reformation England*, ed. by Jonathan Willis (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016), pp. 259-76 (p. 273).

⁷⁰ Patrick Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft: Essays on English Religion in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London; New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), p. 106.

⁷¹ Effie Botonaki, ‘Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen’s Spiritual Diaries: Self-Examination, Covenanting, and Account Keeping’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 30.1 (Spring 1999), 3-21; Julie A. Eckerle, ‘Structures of piety in Elizabeth Richardson’s *Legacie*’, in *Genre and Women’s Life Writing in*

Nicholas presents valuable opportunities to investigate a male writer's literary expressions that were shared by other male and female writers.

St Nicholas' poems are preserved in a meticulous manuscript bound and stored in the Birmingham University Library (MS BUL 5/iv/23). The manuscript miscellany contains seventy poems composed by St Nicholas and his family. H. Neville Davies has edited this verse in a work entitled *At Vacant Hours: Poems By Thomas St Nicholas and His Family*.⁷² As Davies points out, the poems were transcribed and compiled by St Nicholas into his manuscript miscellany. Davies states that, presumably, some of the poems were originally written down somewhere else. Some of St Nicholas' poems were written whilst he was in prison or whilst travelling – where his manuscript miscellany was not necessarily with him at the time. As a result, some of the poems in the manuscript are 'fair copies' and others 'corrected drafts'.⁷³ Davies is certain that all the poems are written in St Nicholas' own hand. This is, as he explains, a clear 'mixed' hand that is 'predominantly italic' but includes 'many secretary elements'.⁷⁴

There were several reasons why St Nicholas left his poems in manuscript rather than publishing them in print. The first was his social status as a 'Gentleman', that is to say, as a propertied man with a coat of arms. To write manuscript verse was an acceptable practice to the aristocratic class and lower gentry. Manuscript poets who shared St Nicholas' social standing, though not his religious and political outlook, include writers like Constance Aston Fowler, Hester Pulter, Elizabeth Isham and Lucy Hutchinson.⁷⁵ The second reason was his education at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Occasional verses were often circulated amongst Cambridge students during this period.⁷⁶ Davies has already suggested that St Nicholas' verse reveals 'familiarity' with

Early Modern England, ed. by Michelle Dowd and Julie Eckerle (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 46-61; Katharine Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century: English Women Writers and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010); Timothy Whelan, ed., *Nonconformist Women Writers, 1720–1840*, 8 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011).

⁷² As far as I am aware this is the only scholarship on St Nicholas to date. Davies provides brief contextual commentary on the poems. I have clearly noted where these have been used in the thesis. After examining the manuscript, I find that Davies' edition contains no errors in its transcriptions. It is for this reason that I am using Davies' edition.

⁷³ Davies, 'Introduction', in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. xxxvi.

⁷⁴ Davies, 'Introduction', in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. xxxv.

⁷⁵ There were some notable exceptions in that several aristocratic manuscript poets had their work (willingly or reluctantly) published in print. For examples see Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, *Forms of Engagement: Women, Poetry and Culture 1640–1680* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), pp. 60-80, pp. 170-201; H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts, 1558–1640* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), passim; Arthur F. Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), passim.

⁷⁶ Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1995), pp. 10-16. For the circulation of verse miscellanies at Oxford, as opposed to Cambridge, see

the poetic writings of two other Emmanuel alumni – Joseph Hall and Mildmay Fane – along with the possible addition of Samuel Clarke.⁷⁷ The third reason was his chosen profession as a lawyer. The Inns of Court, where St Nicholas resided for a time, saw the frequent composition and circulation of manuscript lyrics – which were often satirical and critical of public figures.⁷⁸

The fourth reason was his political and religious views as a dissenter. St Nicholas composed much of his manuscript verse after the Restoration. Writing in manuscript allowed men like him to criticise, without fear of reprisal or imprisonment, the persecution of dissenters.⁷⁹ It allowed St Nicholas the possibility of circulating his poetry to trusted friends and family who shared his religious views and political values.⁸⁰ Lastly, manuscript collections like St Nicholas' represent what Margaret Ezell calls attempts at 'preservation' for future generations of the family and household.⁸¹ This ensured, as St Nicholas himself asserted, that manuscript collections composed by and kept within his family were mnemonic, allowing the 'next age' to see 'Things far off as if close by'.⁸²

Thus, ultimately, St Nicholas' choice to write in manuscript was about tact just as much as taste. As H. R. Woudhuysen observes, the attraction of composing verse in manuscript to the gentry class lay in the 'medium's social status, its personal appeal, relative privacy, freedom from government control, its cheapness, and its ability to make works quickly available to a select audience'.⁸³ This did not mean, as Zeynep Tenger and Paul Trolande point out, that seventeenth-century manuscript writers were

Mary Hobbs, *Early Seventeenth-Century Verse Miscellany Manuscripts* (Aldershot, England: Scholar Press, 1992), passim.

⁷⁷ Davies, 'St Nicholas, Thomas (bap. 1602, d. 1668)', *ODNB*.

⁷⁸ Love, *Scribal Publication*, pp. 181-182; Michelle O'Callaghan, *The English Wits: Literature and Sociability in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), pp. 10-34.

⁷⁹ For the literary culture of manuscript writing amongst dissenters see N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1987), pp. 110-117.

⁸⁰ Alan P. F. Sell argues, dissenters wrote in order to 'sustain their fellowships, to rebuke their intellectual foes, to express their faith and, above all, to propagate the Gospel' (Alan P. F. Sell, 'Varieties of English Separatist and Dissenting Writings', in *Writing and Religion in England, 1558-1689: Studies in Community-Making and Cultural Memory*, ed. by Roger D. Sell and Anthony W. Johnson (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 25-46 (p. 25).

⁸¹ Margaret J. M. Ezell, 'Invisible Books', in *Producing the Eighteenth-Century Book: Writers and Publishers in England, 1650-1800*, ed. by Laura L. Runge and Pat Rogers (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), pp. 53-69 (p. 66).

⁸² Thomas St Nicholas, 'Upon Perusal of My Ancient Evidences' (1665-1666), lines 101, 25, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 126.

⁸³ Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts*, p. 15.

‘dead set against print’; rather, ‘they made strategic choices’ and ‘deployed texts tactically’.⁸⁴

St Nicholas’ verse was, thus, not epideictic, conceited, or seeking patronage. Instead, his manuscript can be best described as one of ‘household publication’ rather than ‘scribal publication’.⁸⁵ Its neat margins, running page numbers, and discursive marginalia indicate it as a calligraphed manuscript that, as Davies suggests (based on other poems included within it), shows evidence of being read by family members.⁸⁶ Davies, however, does not mention whether any copies of St Nicholas’ poems reside in other manuscript miscellanies, and I have found no evidence to suggest otherwise.

The style of St Nicholas’ poetry is refreshingly varied. He experiments with hymns, psalm collages, an ‘echo’ poem, verse epistles, an epithalamion, epitaphs, anagrams, meditations, poems on the *ars moriendi*, providence and prophecy pieces, and even eco-poetry. His poems are also peppered with Greek and Latin phrases, and some poems are written in Latin.⁸⁷ St Nicholas’ poetic compositions are fascinatingly topical because he chose to write them in different places. He composed verses during his coach journeys to York, whilst staying in inns, in his prison cell at Pontefract Castle, when visiting London and on a trip to the seaside, and after pleasant strolls across his estate in Hoaden, Ash, Kent – where his ‘rustic pen’ composed much of his later verse during his retirement in the 1660s.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Zeynep Tenger and Paul Trolande, ‘From Print versus Manuscript to Sociable Authorship and Mixed Media: A Review of Trends in the Scholarship of Early Modern Publication’, *Literature Compass*, 7.11 (2010), pp. 1035-1048 (p. 1038).

⁸⁵ ‘Household publication’ marks the position between a work in progress and ‘scribal publication’. Cf., Narveson, *Bible Readers*, p. 70. For ‘scribal publication’ during this period see Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

⁸⁶ Davies, ‘Introduction’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. xi-xiv. For poems by members of St Nicholas’ family and his poetic responses to them, see Elizabeth St Nicholas, ‘From my Daughter to her Brother at School’ (1653), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 47; John St Nicholas, ‘An Echo to “An Hymn of Praise”... 1663’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 73-75; Thomas St Nicholas, ‘A Return to the Echo’ (1663), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 76-78; J. P., ‘Upon My Retiring into the Country’ (1663), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 79-80; Thomas St Nicholas, ‘A Return to the Last Friend’s Lines’ (1663), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 81-82.

⁸⁷ For his Latin poems, see Thomas St Nicholas, ‘Ad Hiberniam, August 2, 1646’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 40; St Nicholas, ‘In Prelium Illud Navale Inter Classes Anglorum Et Batavorum, Feb 18, 19, 20, 1652’ (1653), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 46.

⁸⁸ St Nicholas, ‘The Recreation of an Accountant... 1662’ (1663), line 568, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 61. For his coach poetry, see Thomas St Nicholas, ‘A Meditation on the Way towards York... July 16, 1644’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 37; Thomas St Nicholas, ‘Upon the Way between Sherburn and York, June 1st, 1646’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 38. For verses written in inns, see Thomas St Nicholas, ‘Upon a Guinea-Pig that in the Night Ran Squeaking up and down My Chamber in Warwick’ (1646), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 41; Thomas St Nicholas, ‘Upon Two Pictures... which I Found Hanging in My Chamber at the Swan in Mansfield... 1646’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 42. For his prison verse, see Chapter One. For verses during his trip to London and the seaside, see Thomas St Nicholas, ‘Upon My First Observation of the Pulling Down of the Great Cross in

Though his choice of verse form and where he wrote it differed, the content of St Nicholas' verse was consistently framed using scripture. Poetry played a vital role in allowing him to express his biblical devotion to God, not just in principle, but in practice. He summed up this poetic ethos when he wrote,

may these few meditations prove
To my poor soul a fruit of God's dear love.
And may he give in strength, that what has flown
From this my rustic pen may be my own
In practise, and then I shall never think
These few hours lost, nor yet ill spent this ink.⁸⁹

The influence of the Bible upon his 'few meditations' is clear to see from titles such as: 'The Recreation of an Accountant... 1662... Being some Broken Meditations on that Arithmetic of Moses, Psalm 90.12' (1663), 'Upon Genesis 3.19' (1663) and 'Micah 6.9; The Voice of The Rod, 1665'.⁹⁰ Although this thesis cannot explore the entire breadth of the Biblicism within St Nicholas' manuscript poetry, it will demonstrate how entrenched it was in some of his most intriguing and representative poems.

Editorial Choices

The dating of St Nicholas' poems is somewhat uncertain. Davies believes that compositions were placed 'chronologically' in the manuscript.⁹¹ I agree with this judgement. There is some evidence to suggest that St Nicholas revised and edited his poetry, but it is hard to know whether he did this while writing or retrospectively.⁹²

Cheapside near Peter's Wood Street, and Paul's Cross' (1644), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 36; Thomas St Nicholas, 'Upon the Going of some Gentlewomen... by the Seaside' (1663), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 83. For his estate poems, see St Nicholas, 'God Speed the Plough' (1663), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 86-89; Thomas St Nicholas, 'Divertisement from Study' (1665), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 124-125.

⁸⁹ St Nicholas, 'The Recreation of an Accountant... 1662' (1663), lines 565-570, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 61.

⁹⁰ For these poems, see St Nicholas, 'The Recreation of an Accountant... 1662' (1663), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 48-61; Thomas St Nicholas, 'Upon Genesis 3.19' (1663), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 84-85; and St Nicholas, 'Micah 6.9; The Voice of The Rod, 1665', in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 104-121.

⁹¹ Davies, 'Introduction', in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. xxxiv.

⁹² Davies, 'Introduction', in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. xxxiv-v.

More than half of the poems in the manuscript remain undated, whereby no date is included in the title or text of the poem. Where this is the case, I have provided a suggested date (the year/s) in parenthesis after the title of the poem I am citing. This is based on contextual evidence within the poem and which other poems it is placed alongside. The poems St Nicholas does date are done so according to the Julian calendar year, which began on March 25. I have modernised these in parenthesis to the Gregorian calendar. Where a poem's date is unclear, I have simply put 'unknown' in parenthesis.

Several of the titles of St Nicholas' poems are long. For the ease of the reader, when cited in the main text of the thesis, these titles have been shortened. The titles are then quoted in full in the Bibliography. Like Davies, I have chosen to put the marginalia of St Nicholas' poems in italics to distinguish it from the main text of those poems.

My Methodology

My methodological approach to St Nicholas' verse models itself after Elizabeth Scott-Baumann's recently coined 'historical formalism'.⁹³ I intend not only to use literary texts as evidence for what St Nicholas was reading, but to explore his writings as 'acts of reading, of re-creation, challenge and appropriation'.⁹⁴ In doing so, following Scott-Baumann, my interest is less in evaluating poetry 'qualitatively' and more in understanding the historical 'specificity' of the poet's style and content.⁹⁵ My focused

⁹³ Qtd. in Eleanor Shevlin, 'Collaborative Reading: Elizabeth Scott-Baumann and Ben Burton's "Encoding Form: A Proposed Database of Poetic Form"', in *Early Modern Online Bibliography*, Online Blog Post, 8 March 2010.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, *Forms of Engagement: Women, Poetry and Culture 1640–1680* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), p. 11.

⁹⁵ Scott-Baumann, *Forms of Engagement*, p. 3. This approach makes sense. As many early modern commentators observed, any attempts to re-present scripture metrically, were to fail poetically, but not devotionally. Thomas Fuller said of Sternhold and Hopkins' *Book of Psalmes* (1562), that one could admire their piety more than their poetry as they 'had drunk more of Jordan than of Helicon' (qtd. in Percy A. Scholes, *The Puritans and Music in England and New England* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 255). Dr. Samuel Johnson explained, after reading Edmund Waller's *Divine Poems* (1685) that 'The ideas of Christian Theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestic for ornament; to recommend them by tropes and figures is to magnify by a concave mirror the sidereal hemisphere' (Dr. Samuel Johnson, 'Edmund Waller', in *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. by George Birbeck Hill, 3 vols (New York: Octagon, 1967), I, pp. 292-293).

examination of St Nicolas provides a particular, and in-depth complement to Scott-Baumann's broader analysis of a gamut of English Protestant poets.⁹⁶

My methodological approach to St Nicholas' 'scripturalism' can also be connected to the work of Marianne Horsdal. Horsdal examines the use of narration as mimesis that was popularised by religious writers such as St. Augustine in his *Confessions*. The use of scripture in St Nicholas' verse can be likened to what Horsdal calls the 'configurational act', or a narration which selects incidents to create a specific response and meaning.⁹⁷ Citing Aristotle's influence on Augustine, Horsdal demonstrates how religious thinkers often wrote with the approach that 'mankind only learns through imitation'.⁹⁸ By citing recent studies by neuropsychologists, she points to how 'mirror neurons' in the brain make cerebral mimesis inevitable when reading an account of actions and events.⁹⁹ A 'vicarious experience' unfolds, a phrase Horsdal borrows from E. Bruner, whereby the reader automatically repeats the text in order to absorb its full meaning.¹⁰⁰ This chimes with Margaret Hannay who terms the emulation of manuscript texts by other scribal authors as evidence of 'reading as rewriting'.¹⁰¹ This intended *simulacrum* – that is, an 'imitation or likeness, of something' (OED) – is precisely the kind used by writers like St Nicholas and is what English 'scripturalism' achieved.¹⁰² The ideas within St Nicholas' verse will be seen as representative of a shared (though imagined) literary community of Bible-reading English Protestants.

My examination of the writing of 'scripturalism', concurs with a growing amount of scholarship which, as Tenger and Trolande describe, is 'chipping away at the notion that manuscript culture could not exist side by side with print'.¹⁰³ As Andrew Cambers has observed, there existed a significant paradigm within manuscript writing

⁹⁶ Cf., Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, 'Lucy Hutchinson, the Bible and *Order and Disorder*', in *The Intellectual Culture of Puritan Women, 1558–1680*, ed. by Johanna Harris and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 176–189; Scott-Baumann, *Forms of Engagement*, passim; Sarah C. E. Ross and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, eds., *Women Poets of the English Civil War* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2018).

⁹⁷ Marianne Horsdal, *Telling Lives: Exploring Dimensions of Narratives* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2012), p. 17.

⁹⁸ Horsdal, *Telling Lives*, p. 17.

⁹⁹ Horsdal, *Telling Lives*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁰ Horsdal, *Telling Lives*, p. 22. This is corroborated by Anil Gupta who explains how as readers 'we want to understand the enrichment that a particular experience entails (or should entail) in the cognitive life of the subject, not in the cognitive life of an external observer prying into the subject' (Anil Gupta, *Truth, Meaning, Experience* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), p. 199).

¹⁰¹ Margaret Hannay, 'Elizabeth Ashburnham Richardson's Meditation on the Countess of Pembroke's Discourse', *English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700*, 9 (2000), pp. 116–119.

¹⁰² l.a., 'simulacrum, n. b.', *OED*, online edn, 2016.

¹⁰³ Tenger and Trolande, 'From Print versus Manuscript to Sociable Authorship and Mixed Media', p. 1040.

which consisted of ‘internalization and externalization, of sociability and the self’.¹⁰⁴ This means, as Harold Love has demonstrated, that a manuscript miscellany is a ‘communal as well as an individual construct’, to be read for what it shows us about the textual ‘communities in which it was created and revised’ – and this includes a manuscript’s engagement with print culture.¹⁰⁵

St Nicholas’ compositions will be seen in this light. His verses will be viewed as part of the intellectual output of a wider literary community which often, but not exclusively, expressed itself in printed works, for, St Nicholas was far more conversant with print culture than manuscript verse miscellanies. From the cloistered hearth and heart, to his encounters with friend and foe, escapes from death and the eventual march towards it, St Nicholas’ poetry modelled itself after a variety of ‘scripturalist’ writing in prose and verse in the press. For this reason, my comparative focus is not on other manuscript poets. I will, however, link his verse to the prose accounts of several manuscript diaries and meditations. In doing so, I reveal how St Nicholas inherited and adapted models of biblical expression in order to identify himself with other like-minded Bible-readers and writers.

Chapters and Structure

The structure of this thesis is thematic rather than chronological. This is to better illustrate the different modes of writing that St Nicholas’ verse falls into. The thesis is divided into three sections entitled ‘Suffering’, ‘Sacred Songs’ and ‘Providence’. These sections are meant to demonstrate how some of St Nicholas’ poems were intended for a specific purpose that followed a particular style of writing (as outlined below).

Each chapter begins with a transcription of the poem/s by St Nicholas being discussed. The poems used in Chapters Two, Four and Five have complete transcriptions of those works, whereas the poem used in Chapters One and Three – St Nicholas’ second longest composition *For My Son* (1643) – are extracts due to the length of that poem.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Cambers, ‘Reading, the Godly, and Self-Writing in England’, p. 802. Also cf., Linda Tredennick, ‘Exteriority in Milton and Puritan Life Writing’, *SEL*, 51.1 (January 2011), pp. 159-179 (p. 161).

¹⁰⁵ Love, *Scribal Publication*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ His longest manuscript poem is, ‘Micah 6.9; The Voice of the Rod, 1665’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 104-121.

Each chapter, in each section, contain two preambles. The first is entitled ‘The Historiography’ followed by another entitled ‘The Cultural Context’. ‘The Historiography’ examines the critical background to the literary form discussed in the chapter. ‘The Cultural Context’ then examines the socio-political and religious contexts of that literary form. ‘Cultural Context’, thus, represents the various types of peoples’ engagement when writing or reading about that literary form.

Section One contains two chapters. Chapter One will explore St Nicholas’ expression of ‘scripturalism’ through his Civil War prison narrative. Written in the summer of 1643 whilst a Royalist captive at Pontefract Castle, his lengthy verse epistle – *For My Son* – will be shown as part of a literary culture of prison writing expressed in prison pamphlets printed during the seventeenth century. The influence upon these texts of John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* (1563) is also examined. By appropriating this text – itself considered by many English Protestants to be almost as authoritative as the Bible – and the scriptures used within it, one will see how Foxe became a touchstone for English authors in expressing their carceral hardships. The extensive use of Foxean tropes, idioms, and imagery reveals how English detainees – whether parliamentarian or Royalist; Leveller or Quaker; Baptist or debtor – were able to compose a recognised mode of protest writing whilst in enclosed and closely guarded spaces. In doing so, these prison narratives created a ‘scripturalist’ community, depicting shared scenes of suffering that portrayed their authors as Christian ‘confessors’ – that is, martyrs who were punished but did not die for their religious beliefs. By drawing on this literary culture, prison writings like St Nicholas’ were connected to those of other prisoners not just by physical context, but historical context too.

St Nicholas managed to avoid contracting a fever that broke out, where ‘some/Amongst us... did grow sick’, in his prison cell at Pontefract, but he contracted a near fatal ague some twenty-four years later at his Hoaden estate.¹⁰⁷ From incarceration to infirmity, Chapter Two will examine the Biblicism of St Nicholas’ Restoration sickness narrative, ‘An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery out of a Dangerous Sickness in the Sixty-fifth Year of Mine Age’ (1667). This hymn was written in the last months before St Nicholas died. The practice of chronicling such illnesses, and one’s piety during them, was very common amongst Bible-minded writers. Such writing was

¹⁰⁷ Thomas St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 231-232, 235, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 20.

enmeshed more generally in the literary practice of the *ars moriendi* or the ‘art of dying well’. In particular, St Nicholas’ scriptural references, gestures, prayer and covenant reveal him to be participating in biblically authorised procedures to be conducted at the sick/death-bed. By exploring personal accounts of, and treatises on, infirmity in print and manuscript within the seventeenth century we can begin to see how St Nicholas’ sickness narrative chimes, both before and after he wrote it, with those of other ‘scripturalist’ writers – Baptists, Quakers, Presbyterians and high churchmen. Though he wrote his account in verse, and sickness narratives were predominantly in prose, his awareness of their scriptural content is striking. Ultimately, such insights provide a wider picture of the shared literary, cultural, and religious values English saints had concerning their rituals when ill or dying.

Section Two has a further two chapters. These will hone in on a specific period of ‘scripturalist’ literary activity during the English Civil War and Interregnum (as opposed to the seventeenth century as a whole), so as to demonstrate how ‘scripturalism’ operated on a micro and not just a macro level. This section will examine not so much how St Nicholas used the Bible to indicate his membership of a broad religious movement (English Protestantism) but rather to identify himself with a particular political movement – parliamentarianism. In this we see how malleable and pliable scripture was. It was just as effective at exposing (as it was at fusing) inherent contradictions and conflicts within any given ideology.

Chapter Three revisits the same poem discussed in Chapter One, but for a different purpose and from a different perspective. This is because St Nicholas’ *For My Son* (1643) describes a crucial and under-investigated mode of early modern English praise – the psalm culture of parliamentarians. Breaking from his lament on captivity he writes, ‘next morn to hear these caged birds sing,/To hear what peals of psalms they forth did ring’.¹⁰⁸ These psalms were sung by the newly captured prisoners brought to Pontefract Castle after the battle at Atherton Moor (31 June 1643).¹⁰⁹ This was no accidental or occasional observation. St Nicholas went on to paraphrase parts of a series of culturally important psalms. Each will be shown to be part of a ‘scripturalist’ literary culture, one that was theologically Calvinist and politically parliamentarian, that recorded the performance of psalm singing and citing by soldier and citizen alike. This

¹⁰⁸ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 541-542, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 26.

¹⁰⁹ Cf., St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 499-502, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 25.

chapter will argue that St Nicholas' 'psalms' were linked to manuscript and printed text that saw such praise as one of solidarity and resistance during the national conflict.

Parliamentarians had other songs in their arsenal. Chapter Four will argue that St Nicholas' 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... over the Dutch at Sea... 1652' (1653) demonstrates a 'scripturalist' culture of battle hymn writing from the late 1640s to early 1650s – by Independents, Republicans and established parish clergy. Textual influences throughout his manuscript hymn will reveal how St Nicholas was responding to other battle hymns in print by other hymnologists as part of this practice of composition in England. The term 'battle hymn' will refer to songs written by parliamentarian poets to celebrate military victories against the Royalist, Scottish and Dutch forces during a decade of almost endless fighting. Many of these were written for Thanksgiving Day ceremonies ordered by Parliament which could be performed in both domestic and congregational settings. We will see how St Nicholas' battle hymn was a scriptural composite of verses that were both specific to the victory he was celebrating, but were also linked to other battle hymns that had come before him.

As a whole, Section Two reveals that though parliamentarians were accused of having a 'contempt of literature', they created their own literature using scripture.¹¹⁰ In Chapters Three and Four I have also emphasized St Nicholas' engagement with English Calvinism through his composition of parliamentarian psalm paraphrases and a parliamentarian battle hymn. This is because English Calvinism provided the impetus and justification to Roundheads like St Nicholas for writing and singing sacred songs during the 1640s and 1650s.

Section Three has just one chapter. This examines St Nicholas' poem 'The Voice of the Rod, 1666: The Burning of the City of London'. His descriptions of that blaze will be compared to other urban fire narratives written during the seventeenth century. By examining these works, I reveal a robust literary culture which ensured that pulpiteers and balladeers, conformers and dissenters, were more united than divided in moralising these events. I focus on St Nicholas' poem as a valuable introduction to providential writings on urban fires. His poem was exceptional, however, in pointing initially to Charles II as culpable for the Great Fire, a charge he prudently dropped in revising the text.

¹¹⁰ Francis Thorne, *The soules solace in times of trouble* (London: 1643), p. 11.

While Section One and Three exhibit the broad appeal and application of scripture to various religious and political groups, Section Two demonstrates its use to exclude Royalists and Catholics and see the parliamentary movement as an exclusive one. All three sections reinforce Christopher Hill's argument that the English Bible was used just as easily to make 'unorthodox or unpopular points' as orthodox and popular ones.¹¹¹

My conclusion will examine the broader implications of St Nicholas' 'scripturalism'. This will inform our understanding of his English Calvinism as less rigid, and his religious dissent as less uncompromising than other more radical dissenters. I will also discuss the internal logic of St Nicholas' 'scripturalism' across his manuscript poems. This will reveal how his repetition of the same scriptures was deliberate and intentional. He used scriptural patterns to convey his poems as not just divinely authored but divinely attested. Finally, my findings on the writing of 'scripturalism' will be shown to concur with an emerging scholarship on the Bible that is challenging our understanding of the political and religious divisions of early modern England.

Engagement with Biblical Scholarship

My study is somewhat unique in the light of recent scholarship on the literary culture of the English Bible. Firstly, the subject matter of this thesis is ambitious. Scholars have either homed in on the representations of particular biblical figures (such as Miriam, Hannah, Deborah, King David, King Hezekiah or the prophet Jeremiah),¹¹² or specific biblical books (such as Exodus, the Song of Songs, the Psalms or Lamentations) in the writings of early modern men and women.¹¹³ I examine the shared deployment of

¹¹¹ Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 6.

¹¹² For examinations of particular biblical figures, see Michele Osherow, *Biblical Women's Voices in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), passim; DeLapp, *The Reformed David(s)*, passim; Micheline White, 'Dismantling Catholic Primers and Reforming Private Prayer: Anne Lock, Hezekiah's Song and Psalm 50/51', in *Private and Domestic Devotion*, ed. by Martin and Ryrie, pp. 93-113; Reuben Sánchez, *Typology and Iconography in Donne, Herbert, and Milton Fashioning the Self after Jeremiah* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), passim.

¹¹³ For examinations of particular biblical books, see John Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation: Deliverance Politics from John Calvin to Martin Luther King Jr* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), pp. 25-55; Clarke, *The Song of Songs*, passim; Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalms Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), passim; Beatrice Groves, *The Destruction of Jerusalem in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), pp. 108-125.

various and wide-ranging biblical passages rather than individual personalities in scripture or specific scriptural books. This is to demonstrate the recognisable paradigms that were being used in the devotional literature of early modern England.

Secondly, the period examined in my thesis is broad. Scholars tend to look at biblically inspired works in very specific historical moments, especially those written during the English Civil War.¹¹⁴ Recent works have also hedged in their investigations of biblical readings and writings by only examining the period between Tudor and Jacobean England.¹¹⁵ By contrast, I investigate the similarities of works produced before, during and after the fighting of the 1640s. In this way, my study is both synchronic (within chapters a literary-historical contextualisation is available owing to the closely contemporaneous texts) and diachronic, in that I study biblical writings over a relatively large period of time.¹¹⁶ This allows me to engage in micro and macro literary studies of how the same scriptures were used and re-used over short and longer periods.

Thirdly, the sources I examine are considerably varied. Where researchers have looked at biblical literature across the seventeenth century, those like Kevin Killeen have excluded ‘manuscript material, diaries or private writings’, the intention being, rather, to reconstitute ‘how biblical exemplarity operated in the public sphere’.¹¹⁷ I, on the other hand, examine scripturally inspired texts in both print and manuscript to reveal how writing on the Bible frequently traversed public and private spheres.¹¹⁸ In doing so, I build on the valuable work of Narveson by demonstrating how early modern printed and manuscript texts were saturated in ‘Scripture-phrase’.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1994), passim; Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660* (New Haven; London: Yale UP, 1994), passim; Anne Lake Prescott, ‘A Year in the Life of King Saul: 1643’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c. 1530–1700*, ed. by Killeen, Smith and Willie, pp. 412–426.

¹¹⁵ Cf., Victoria Brownlee, *Biblical Readings and Literary Writings in Early Modern England, 1558–1625* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018); Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue: Religious Identity and the Ten Commandments in England, c.1485–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2017).

¹¹⁶ This approach is influenced by that used by Katherine Jo Smith in her ‘Ovidian female-voiced complaint poetry in early modern England’, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2016), in *EThOS* <<http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?did=1&uin=uk.bl.ethos.731319>> [accessed 1 December 2016], p. 22.

¹¹⁷ Killeen, *The Political Bible*, p. 17.

¹¹⁸ This approach is in line with the recent work of other literary scholars, see DeLapp, *The Reformed David(s)*, pp. 15–18; Narveson, *Bible Readers*, pp. 15–16.

¹¹⁹ Narveson, *Bible Readers*, p. 3.

Conclusion

This study, thus, creates new insight into the literary practices of sickness narratives, prison polemics and martyrology, psalmody, hymnology, tales of urban fires and providence, and the nature of self-writing in seventeenth-century England. Such a literary culture is seen as deeply rooted in St Nicholas' desire to practise a 'sacred art' of sharing God's providences and deliverances – so that others may learn and live. By doing so, this thesis hopes to show how St Nicholas expressed his verse through the tenets of Mount Sion rather than Mount Helicon.

He embodied the sentiments of those English divines like John Collinges who wrote that when it came to the Bible,

Read [it] often, and with *judgment*, always carry your *heart* with your *eye*: You will find a *glory*, a *majesty*, a *mystery*, a *depth* in those lines, which you will never be weary of *fathoming*, though you shall never be able to find the *bottom*.¹²⁰

To St Nicholas, the '*majesty*' and '*mystery*' of scripture was everywhere, echoed in nature as much as it was evidenced within man. This is why, in a pastoral lyric entitled 'God Speed the Plough' (1663), he equated his experience of an afternoon stroll across his estate ('survey[ing] my pasture... plants') as comparable to reading God's Word,

when of all this glorious folio book
I turn the leaves and circumspectly look,
I find, in every chapter, verse, and line,
Lessons so wonderful and so divine
That speak that wisdom, power, and goodness, too,
Of the great God, I stand admiring who
Can be an atheist or can choose but fear
That God, who doth so sensibly shine there;
And think, with one book more my library

¹²⁰ John Collinges, *Faith & experience, or, A short narration of the holy life and death of Mary Simpson, late of Gregories Parish in the city of Norwich* (London: 1649), B1v-r.

Is rich enough, is stored sufficiently.¹²¹

What follows is my attempt to ‘circumspectly look’ and fathom the depth, though perhaps not the bottom, of the scriptural ‘lessons’ St Nicholas experienced and described in his manuscript poems.

¹²¹ St Nicholas, ‘God Speed the Plough’ (1663), lines 130-135, 139-148, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 89. Elsewhere he would refer to nature as ‘God’s great folios here and there’ (St Nicholas, ‘Divertisement from Study’ (1665), line 9, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 124). His statements were influenced by, amongst others, the French Protestant poet Guillaume de Saluste Du Bartas. To Bartas, ‘The World’s a Schoole, where (in a generall Storie)/God alwayes reades dumbe Lectures of his Glorie’ (Susan Snyder, ed., *The Divine Weeks and Works of Guillaume De Saluste, Sieur du Bartas*, trans. by Josuah Sylvester, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), I, p. 115. For the opposite view, consider Lucy Hutchinson’s translation (which she later regretted) of the Epicurean poet Lucretius’ verse, ‘Nature, if this you rightly understand,/Will thus appeare free from the proud command/Of soveraigne power, who of her owne accord/Doth all things act, subiected to no lord’ (Lucy Hutchinson, ‘De rerum natura (1658–1660)’, in *The Works of Lucy Hutchinson, Vol. 1: The Translation of Lucretius: Part 1 Introduction and Text*, ed. by Ashley Reid Barbour, David Norbrook, and Maria Cristina Zerbino, Vol. 1, Part. 1 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), I, 2.1118-21).

SECTION I: SUFFERING

CHAPTER ONE

‘What piteous lodgings these poor men had’: The Bible, ‘The Book of Martyrs’ and Prison Narratives in Seventeenth-Century England

Extracts from *For My Son* (1643)

Unto a private room in Sheffield, where I found
Some fellow pris’ners that were (lines 205-206)

[...]

Kept without beds and in cold irons laid,
Walked with their army divers weeks together
From place to place, at length I know not whither.
We know the fable: if the lion say
The hare have horns, what then? Well, there I lay
With these my fellows, and I there, undressed,
The first three nights, on a soft wainscot chest
With a good cushion underneath my head,
Did sleep as well as on some feather bed;
And had good health, I bless my God. But some
Amongst us, what with closeness of the room
(Ten of us packed together), what with beer
Ill brewed, new, muddy, though our other cheer
Were tolerable, did grow sick, and then
Petitioned that till they were well again
They might more private be. Answer was made
By some o’the Council that small mercy had,
‘Sick let them be! What care we what they ail?
The devil go with them!’ Thus they to prevail
In that poor suit had much ado. (lines 222-241)

[...]

On foot to Doncaster, full half a score
Miles. Thence, next day, to Pont’fract, full ten more.

When we came thither, melted out with heat,
 Choked up with dust, 'twas strange to see what great
 Rejoicing, what insulting, yea, what jeering,
 What scoffs were used, yea, what domineering,
 What snapping at's by the good subjects there,
 Like bawling curs at leading of a bear. (lines 263-270)

[...]

From Pont' fract, after two nights' rest, along
 They led us our wonted footmarch among
 Our fellow pris'ners to another station,
 To Tadcaster, which is by computation
 Eight miles on this side York. (lines 277-281)

[...]

We did desire to see if we could get
 Some beds to rest on, and two things at last
 Like beds we got, whereon when we were cast
 Straightways an ambuscado we discovered.
 A numerous brood of grey-coats there that hovered,
 Expert old soldiers that had thoroughly lined
 The sheets and blankets, who, as if quite pined,
 Made such a fierce assault, not giving over,
 And stuck so close that ere we could recover
 It was at least a fortnight first. So these
 Made these our beds prove but a little ease.
 After that night I lay some eight nights more
 Where, though it made my bones a little sore
 At first: the top of a clean parlour table. (lines 292-305)

[...]

for there to fast and pray

Was in no great request. For sure I am,
 While we were there, one day the marshal came
 And told us he had orders to forbid
 Our use of praying jointly, and so did;
 Said there was notice taken, said that we

Continuing so to do must severed be. (lines 318-324)

[...]

One of my fellows, a stout, honest man,

Mr Hen[ry]

And so approved i'the cause since it began,

Wesby

One that had done and suffered much, his lands,

His house, his goods, all seized into the hands

O'the adverse part, his barns set all on flame,

One of the four exempt at Rotherham,

Of whom, for all his loss by thieves and fire,

The earl's committees did not less require

Than a full thousand marks, and to enforce

His payment had before this time dealt worse

With him than us, had in a dungeon deep

Put him six yards within the ground, though keep

Him there they did (perhaps they durst) not, long; (lines 347-359)

[...]

To see poor men stripped to their shirts and driven

Ten miles or twelve barefoot, some six or seven

Tied by the thumbs together, some, that stood

With shirts like boards stiffened with cold gore blood,

Surbate and lamed i'the feet with walking bare,

Begging for water for God's sake, no care

To send for surgeons to dress their wounds,

No pity to such as were fall'n in swounds;

And but a few days after to behold,

A thousand more like sheep brought to the fold

Fight on Atherton

Of Pont'fract Castle in as poor a case

Moor, June 31

As were the former into the same place;

To see one knocked for reaching in his hand

A cup of water to a pris'ner, and

Another chid for dealing out in bowls

A little milk to those distressèd souls;

To think what piteous lodging these poor men

Had by such heaps [laid together], nak'd in their sorry den;

To think what poor, uncomfortable greetings
 Their poor sad wives and friends had at next meetings,
 And yet could scarce (such was the keeper's hate)
 Get leave to bring them sorry rags t'the grate;
 To see wat loads of plundered goods were brought (lines 491-513)

[...]

Of bread and food commanded till no more
 The army needed (nor yet so much neither,
 A man would think, when many loads together
 Of bread were kept so long till it was grown
 Not fit for man nor beast, but to be thrown
 Out into ditches), then to think upon
 Poor farmers' children that meanwhile were gone
 Wand'ring t'the leaguer (what to do? Alas,
 Beg some o'the bread that erst their fathers' was);
 To think of suchlike objects of the ears
 And eyes would wring out floods of brinish tears,
 From driest eyes, would melt an heart of marble,
 Would make a dumb man mournful ditties warble. (lines 528-540)

[...]

If the great God have firmly so decreed
 That he shall ne'er his own house see again,
 Nor hear of Zion's peace, but here remain
 And live and die in this stronghold before
 This war be ended, and be seen no more,
 God's will be done. (lines 592-597)

This chapter will discuss the depiction of imprisonment within St Nicholas' lengthy manuscript verse epistle *For My Son* (1643). This was written whilst he languished as a captive of the Royalists in Pontefract Castle, West Yorkshire. St Nicholas tells us that he was captured on 'May 3 [1643]' and he end-dates his verse epistle as 'July 7, 1643'.¹ It is unclear when St Nicholas was released. We do know that his next poem written as a 'free man' was, 'A Meditation on the Way towards York' composed, as its title makes clear, on 'July 16, 1644'.² It is probable that St Nicholas transcribed *For My Son* into his manuscript miscellany around the same time.

My aim is to examine his account as part of a wider literary pattern of suffering in prison narratives written in England during the seventeenth century. St Nicholas, like so many other prison writers, recorded his role as a 'sacrificial lamb' and 'confessor' who linked moments (experienced or observed) of routine stripping, poor diet and dehydration, makeshift beds, overcrowded cells and the suppression of communal prayers as important scenes which represented incarceration in early modern England.³

I wish to show how such writing was distinctly scripturalist in nature. Although many of the detainees examined here did not perish in prison, they could not have expected to survive their imprisonment. Prisoner writers had to convince their readers of their afflictions to secure their place as part of the legacy of biblical and English martyrs. This approach was twofold. On the one hand, prisoner writers imitated other contemporary accounts composed by and about other inmates. On the other hand, such accounts were also premised on John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1563) in order to represent their present prison persecutions via a Protestant past. Prison authors relied not only on the scriptural authority of Foxe's text, but the scriptures used within it, in depicting their carceral hardships. In doing so, prisoner writers like St Nicholas participated in a recognised mode of Christian protest that ran across the country's prisons and also connected writers historically.⁴

¹ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 51, 630, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 15, p. 28.

² St Nicholas, 'A Meditation on the Way towards York... July 16, 1644', in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 37.

³ Those who survived their prison writings were not known as 'martyrs' but rather 'Confessors'. Cf., Samuel Clarke, *A Generall Martyrologie* (London: 1651), A3v.

⁴ It should be noted that not all prisoners felt that they had been treated badly. Lady Anne Harcourt noted in her diary how when she and her husband William Waller were imprisoned in the Tower for ten weeks in the Autumn of 1659, 'we found great kindnes from the warder; which was a great leasoning of our trouble'. She adds, however, that such treatment 'is a rare thing, as I perceive by the relation of what other Gentilmen sufered from theyr keepers, to find any amongst them that were not sever, crose, and covetous, to the great prejudice of theyr prisoners' (Lady Anne Harcourt, 'The Diary of Lady Anne

St Nicholas' prison verse in manuscript represents a cultural phenomenon of writing and reading what I have called 'prison narratives' or 'captivity narratives' during this period. Though he did not write for a specific public audience, (unlike printed prison accounts), intriguingly St Nicholas demonstrates an awareness of the forms, images and discourses that were being used within them. Like other captivity narratives, St Nicholas wrote for posterity, believing that his work would join the chorus of other 'godly' prison writers. For he lived under the constant fear that he might 'die in this stronghold'.⁵ As a result, this chapter's insights add to the renewed interest in the transmission of Foxe's martyrology, the reinvigorated investigations into early modern news and pamphleteering, and above all establishes the need for fresh examinations into the prison literature of this period.⁶

The Historiography

There have been several calls recently for an active exploration of early modern prison writing in England. Ruth Ahnert states that 'early modern prison literature... has been a relatively understudied area'.⁷ Whilst Molly Murray argues that the basic source of difficulty in studying the pre-modern prison is the 'poor state of the archive' with its scarcity of materials.⁸ When found, accounts of prison narratives, particularly in

Harcourt', in *The Harcourt Papers*, ed. by Edward H. Harcourt, 14 vols (London: 1880-1905), I, pp. 169-196 (p. 190)).

⁵ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), line 595, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 27. Although he was a prisoner of some importance, St Nicholas does not appear to have been an officer. Cf., St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 437-442, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 24. St Nicholas was however later commissioned captain of a troop of horse on the 20 December 1643. Cf., Davies, 'St Nicholas, Thomas (bap. 1602, d. 1668)', *ODNB*.

⁶ For the critical interest in the influence of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* see Thomas P. Anderson and Ryan Netzley, eds., *Acts of Reading: Interpretation, Reading Practices, and the Idea of the Book in John Foxe's Actes and Monuments* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2010); Andrew Hiscock, *Reading Memory in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), pp. 90-112; Elizabeth Evenden and Thomas S. Freeman, eds., *Religion and the Book in Early Modern England: The Making of John Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011). For the renewed interest in newsbooks see Sabrina A. Baron and Brendan Dooley, eds., *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2001); Joad Raymond, 'Irrational, Impractical and Unprofitable: Reading the News in Seventeenth-Century Britain', in *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. by Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 185-212; Michael Mendle, 'English Newsbooks and Irish Rebellion 1641-1649', *American Historical Review*, 112.3 (June 2007), pp. 924-925; Jayne E. E. Boys, *London's News Press and the Thirty Years War: Studies in Early Modern Cultural, Political, and Social History* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2011); Marcus Nevitt, *Poetry and the Art of English Newswriting* (forthcoming).

⁷ Ruth Ahnert, 'The Prison in Early Modern Drama', *Literature Compass*, 9.1 (January 2012), pp. 34-47 (p. 43).

⁸ Molly Murray, 'Measured Sentences: Forming Literature in the Early Modern Prison', *HLQ*, 72.2 (June 2009), pp. 147-167 (p. 150).

manuscript, are often partial, anecdotal, and incomplete.⁹ This is in stark contrast to abundant scholarship on printed ‘gallows speeches’ of this period (which this chapter does not examine).¹⁰

Nonetheless, there have been attempts to navigate through the field of prison writing. Several scholars have examined certain moments, but by no means the entire period, of prison writing within seventeenth-century England. Peter Lake and Michael Questier’s work on imprisoned Protestants from the Renaissance to the 1630s is well known.¹¹ Andrew Cambers’ investigation into the reading practices within London prisons during the same period is equally instructive.¹² John R. Knott provides a useful survey of the religious writings of English martyrdom,¹³ as do Thomas S. Freeman’s and Thomas F. Mayer’s recent edited volume *Martyrs and Martyrdom in England, circa 1400–household p1700*, and Susannah Brietz Monta’s monograph *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England*.¹⁴ Such lines of enquiry are picked up after the Restoration by critics such as Sharon Achinstein who examines the prison literature of dissenters.¹⁵ So far, however, none of these works have sought to establish a paradigm

⁹ For examples see Lady Brilliana Harley, *Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley*, ed. by Thomas Taylor Lewis (London: Camden Society, 1854), p. 202; John Hodges, *Autobiography of Captain John Hodgson*, ed. by J. H. Turner (Brighouse: A.B. Bayes, 1882), p. 100; Adam Martindale, *The Life of Adam Martindale*, ed. by Richard Parkinson (Chetham Society, 1845), p. 41; John Birch, *Military Memoirs of Colonel John Birch*, ed. by T. W. Webb (London: 1828), p. 95.

¹⁰ For examples see Margaret J. M. Ezell, ‘Dying to Be Read: Gallows Authorship in Late Seventeenth-Century England’, *Authorship*, 3.1 (2014), pp. 1–14; Gregory Durston, *Crime and Justice in Early Modern England: 1500–1750* (Chichester: Barry Rose Law Publishers, 2004), *passim*; Lincoln B. Faller, *Turned to Account: The Forms and Functions of Criminal Biography in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), *passim*.

¹¹ Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (London: Yale UP, 2002), pp. 187–228; and Peter Lake and Michael Questier, ‘Prisons, Priests, and People’, in *England’s Long Reformation, 1500–1800*, ed. by Nicholas Tyacke (London: University College London UP, 1998), pp. 195–234. However, not all of this work is based on English Protestants; indeed much is focused on the incarceration of recusant Catholics. On the whole, Lake and Questier argue for the deployment of similar tropes by Catholics and Protestants to reveal how the representation of martyrdom was more about conflict and competition rather than consensus.

¹² Cambers, *Godly Reading*, pp. 212–242.

¹³ Knott jumps from discussing the work of the Leveller John Lilburne’s *The Christian Mans Triall* (1641) to that of John Milton’s *Eikonoklastes* (1649). Cf., John R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563–1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), pp. 146–147, pp. 160–165.

¹⁴ Thomas S. Freeman and Thomas F. Mayer, eds., *Martyrs and Martyrdom in England, circa 1400–1700* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2007); Susannah Brietz Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009).

¹⁵ Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton’s England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 59–83. Also cf., Kathleen Lynch, ‘Into Jail and into Print: John Bunyan Writes the Godly Self’, *HLQ*, 72.2 (2009), pp. 273–290.

of prison writing that spans continuously from the Reformation to the latter part of the seventeenth century.¹⁶

This is due to the gap in scholarship on the carceral writings of the Civil War and, in particular, of the expressions of parliamentary prisoners such as St Nicholas. Peter Ghosh argues that because there was a deep desire to ‘bury the Civil War epoch’ there was relatively ‘little English writing’ about the parliamentary party that had not only won that war but was also seen as being responsible for starting it.¹⁷ Tristram Hunt argues in *The English Civil War: At First Hand* that – unlike America and France – in Britain the collective memory of the part played by Cromwell and his men in the revolutionary decades seems to have been ‘totally jettisoned’.¹⁸ Consequently, after the Restoration, and for some time after that, many parliamentarians were ‘marginalised in national memory’.¹⁹ This was aided by the fact that many of the Commonwealth’s former proponents were keen to downplay their resistance to the King after the Restoration.²⁰ Though Parliament and its army had achieved a remarkable victory over King Charles I’s forces, many wanted to forget the 1640s altogether.

Due to these historical curtailments, the everyday accounts of ordinary people thrust into prisons during the English Civil War were forgotten, overlooked or erased by contemporary and succeeding historians.²¹ This is why, on closer inspection, critics

¹⁶ By contrast, important work has been undertaken which connects prison accounts written during the sixteenth century. Cf., Ruth Ahnert, *The Rise of Prison Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013).

¹⁷ Peter Ghosh, ‘Max Weber’s Idea of “Puritanism”: A Case Study in the Empirical Construction of the Protestant Ethic’, *History of European Ideas*, 29.2 (2003), pp. 183-221 (p. 196). For an up-to-date summation of the critiques of *The Protestant Ethic* see Adrian Furnham, *The Psychology of Behaviour at Work*, 2nd edn (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012), pp. 70-73; and Joshua Derman, *Max Weber in Politics and Social Thought: from Charisma to Canonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), pp. 91-97.

¹⁸ Tristram Hunt, *The English Civil War: At First Hand* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. xii.

¹⁹ Ghosh, ‘Max Weber’s Idea of “Puritanism”’, p. 196.

²⁰ John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), pp. 166-169; Matthew Neufeld, *The Civil Wars after 1660: Public Remembering in Late Stuart England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 55-86; John Seed, ‘The Spectre of Puritanism: Forgetting the Seventeenth Century in David Hume’s “History of England”’, *Social History*, 30.4 (November 2005), pp. 444-462; Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and some Contemporaries* (London: Faber, 1984), pp. 23-26.

²¹ Joseph Cornish’s *A Brief and Impartial History of the Puritans* (1772) skips over much of the Civil War by recounting the beheading of archbishop William Laud in 1645 and that of King Charles I in 1649 almost in the same breath (pp. 43-46). The historian Laurence Echard only mentions the imprisonment of one minister during the 1640s, Ephraim Udall, who died in 1647. Cf., Laurence Echard, *The History of England*, 3 vols (London: 1718), II, p. 597. However, Udall’s imprisonment is not mentioned at all by historians like Arnold Hunt. Cf., Arnold Hunt, ‘Udall, Ephraim (bap. 1587, d. 1647)’, *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, May 2008. Equally vague are Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or, An Epitome of the Civil Wars of England, from 1640 to 1660* (London: 1679), p. 130, p. 132; and John Oldmixon, *The History of England, During the Reigns of the Royal House of Stuart* (London: 1730), p. 218, p. 257, p. 343. This is part of a general obfuscation of religious groups imprisoned during the early years of the

such as Patrick Collinson and Ann Hughes have come to agree that parliamentarians were ‘greatly misrepresented’ by their antagonists during this period.²² By contrast, the writings of imprisoned Royalists have received much better treatment from scholars such as Lois Potter, Raymond A. Anselment, Robert Wilcher and Jerome De Groot.²³

This coverage of the scholarship on the early modern English prison reveals how my chapter’s aims are timely and very much needed. My investigations show how Civil War prison writings like St Nicholas’ were not a departure from but rather a continuation of those writings by inmates across the seventeenth century. My research not only provides an antecedent for this literary culture in earlier Marian carceral writings, but also an origin for the genre of Protestant captivity narratives that flourished later in America between the late seventeenth and the late eighteenth centuries.²⁴

The Cultural Context

The early modern public in England relished narratives about prisons and prisoners. The public desire for such literature can be easily demonstrated in its frequency on the Renaissance stage, execution narratives and pardon pamphlets.²⁵ This literature was

conflict, such as the Catholics, that are only recently being brought to light. Cf., Alice Dailey, *The English Martyr from Reformation to Revolution* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame UP, 2012).

²² Hughes, *Gangraena*, p. 11; Collinson, *Cranmer*, p. 106. Also see Richard Baxter, *An Abridgment of Mr. Baxter’s History of his Life and Times*, ed. by Edmund Calamy (London: 1702), p. 318.

²³ Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), pp. 134–138; Raymond A. Anselment, “‘Stone Walls’ and ‘Iron Bars’: Richard Lovelace and the Conventions of Seventeenth-Century Prison Literature”, *Renaissance and Reformation*, 17.1 (1993), pp. 15–34; Robert Wilcher, *The Writing of Royalism, 1628–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), pp. 252–254; Jerome De Groot, ‘Prison Writing, Writing Prison during the 1640s and 1650s’, *HLQ*, 72.2 (2009), pp. 193–215.

²⁴ Cf., Greg Sieminski, ‘The Puritan Captivity Narrative and the Politics of the American Revolution’, *American Quarterly*, 42.1 (March 1990), pp. 35–56; James D. Hartman, ‘Providence Tales and the Indian Captivity Narrative: Some Transatlantic Influences on Colonial Puritan Discourse’, *Early American Literature*, 32.1 (1997), pp. 66–81; Ulla Haselstein, ‘Puritans and Praying Indians: Versions of Transculturation in Mary Rowlandson’s Captivity Narrative (1682)’, in *Missions of Interdependence: A Literary Directory*, ed. by Gerhard Stilz (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2002), pp. 3–14; Sara Humphreys, ‘The Mass Marketing of the Colonial Captive Hannah Duston’, *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 41.2 (2011), pp. 149–178. Many of these narratives had much in common with those of the Civil War era. They were anti-Catholic, saw persecution as a sign of election, described prisoners being stripped, starved and confined to small lodgings.

²⁵ For the staging of prisons see Phillip Shaw, ‘The Position of Thomas Dekker in Jacobean Prison Literature’, *PMLA*, 62.2 (June 1947), pp. 366–391; Musa Gurnis-Farrell, ‘Martyr Acts: Playing with Foxe’s Martyrs on the Public Stage’, in *In Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. by Jane Hwang Degenhardt and Elizabeth Williamson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 175–193; Philip D. Collington, ‘Pent-Up Emotions: Pity and the Imprisonment of Women in Renaissance Drama’, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 16 (2003), pp. 162–191; Mariko Ichikawa, *The Shakespearean Stage Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP,

revived in the narratives of persecuted radicals during the 1630s under the archbishop of Canterbury William Laud that were chronicled by men such as Henry Burton, John Bastwick and William Prynne.²⁶ At the outbreak of the Civil War, many more Englishmen (one in eight adult males was a soldier) faced the prospect of writing and reading about imprisonment.²⁷ After the Restoration, prison accounts reached a hiatus as narratives of insults, assaults and flagrant maleficence within English prisons flowed through the press through to the end of the seventeenth century.²⁸

Prison narratives used two principal formats that were linked to their author's choice of medium. Those written for print adopted the style of newsbooks.²⁹ Newsbooks were small eight to twelve-page quarto pamphlets with six to eight pages of text. These were the ancestors of modern newspapers and started appearing in the early 1640s. Like newsbooks, printed prison narratives were written in a chronological manner. Authors had to constantly assert the truth of what they were describing to readers already sceptical about the veracity of printed news.³⁰ Manuscript prison accounts adopted the style of manuscript newsletters.³¹ These, like them, were intensely

2012), pp. 46-51. For pardon and execution pamphlets see Lynn Robson, "'No nine days wonder': embedded Protestant narratives in early modern prose murder pamphlets 1573-1700", (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2003), in *EThOS* <<http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?did=1&uin=uk.bl>> [accessed 23 March 2015], passim.

²⁶ Henry Burton, *A narration of the life of Mr. Henry Burton* (London: 1643); John Bastwick, *The Letany* (London: 1637); William Prynne, *A New Discovery of the Prelate's Tyranny* (London: 1641). Also cf., Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom*, pp. 136-144.

²⁷ Estimates of the percentage of fighting males ranges from one in five to one in ten, so I have rounded this up. Cf., Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603-1714* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 160; Barbara Donagan, *War in England, 1642-1649* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), pp. 215-216. As one news pamphlet in 1643 put it, the influx of 'prisoners cryes' during the Civil War was the 'reason why people our Martyrs adore' (Anon, *A New diurnall of passages more exactly drawne up then heretofore* (Oxford: 1643), A4r).

²⁸ Cf., John Whitehead, *For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts to be read in their meetings: the breathings of a prisoner for the testimony of Jesus* (London: 1662); J[ohn] Knap., *A short narrative or anatomie of the Fleet-prison, Newgate, and both the compters* (London: 1671); Humphrey Smith, *A collection of the several writings and faithful testimonies of... Humphry Smith who dyed a prisoner for the testimony of Jesus, in Winchester common-goal* (London: 1683); E. S., Gentleman in Prison, *A companion for debtors and prisoners* (London: 1699).

²⁹ Joad Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks, 1641-1649* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 21.

³⁰ For the stock usage of 'A True Relation' in prison pamphlets of the period see William Fennor, *A true description of the lawes, justice, and equity of a compter... With a character of a jayle and jaylor* (London: 1629); Anon, *A True relation of two merchants of London, who were taken prisoners by the cavaliers* (London: 1642); Thomas Carleton, *The captives complaint, or... a true relation of the prisoners spiritual progress* (London: 1668); Anon, *Wish upon wish, or Dangerfields lamentation. Being a true relation, of a discovery of all the rogueries of Captain Dangerfield, who now is a close prisoner in his Majestys gaol of Newgate* (London: 1688?). For the pamphlet culture's emphatic claim to truthfulness see Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader*, pp. 139-149.

³¹ For examples see Harley, *Letters*, ed. by Lewis, p. 202; Hodges, *Autobiography*, ed. by Turner, p. 100; Martindale, *Life*, ed. by Parkinson, p. 41; Birch, *Memoirs*, ed. by Webb, p. 95.

personal, mostly anecdotal and shared by a small coterie of followers. Their content could include sensitive topics without fear of ridicule.³² This should not disguise the fact, as Johanna Harris has shown, that letter writing was ‘community-making’: it drew together a wide range of participants, linking them ‘ideologically’ across many divides, ‘including social status, education, profession and gender’.³³ Occasionally these print and manuscript formats intersected, whereby prisoners styled their complaints as letters but in pamphlets that had prefatory addresses to the reader and concluding postscripts. Due to limited writing materials, or just the exigencies of time, some prison stories were also shared and circulated orally.³⁴

Prison narratives were written for a variety of reasons, not all of them obvious. Firstly, they were there to describe the author’s prison hardships to family, friends, parishioners and colleagues.³⁵ Paternal prison verses like St Nicholas’, which were addressed to a child of the author’s, were common.³⁶ Secondly, captivity narratives (textual or auricular) were meant for other inmates in other prisons. Prisoners frequently quoted printed narratives by other prisoners (whether friends or strangers to them) in their own published tracts.³⁷ Thirdly, prison accounts were used as acts of

³² For the origins and continuation of manuscript newsletters during this period see Richard Cust, ‘News and Politics in Early-Seventeenth-Century England’, in *The English Civil War*, ed. by Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (London: Arnold, 1997), pp. 233-260; Clive Holmes, ‘The County Community in Stuart Historiography’, in *The English Civil War*, ed. by Cust and Hughes, pp. 212-232 (pp. 213-218); and Ann Hughes, ‘Local History and the Origins of the Civil War’, in *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics, 1603–1642*, ed. by Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (Harlow: Longman, 1989), pp. 224-226.

³³ Johanna Harris, ‘Lady Brilliana Harley’s Letters and Puritan Intellectual Culture’, *Literature Compass*, 9.3 (2012), pp. 262-270 (p. 262).

³⁴ A classic example can be found in the tale of the Fifth Monarchist John Rogers held captive in Carisbrooke Castle during the mid 1650s. News of the physical violence inflicted upon him ‘took report round the Island and into England’ whereby a Barber took the ‘news of this sad Tragedy to Newport, where the next day being Market, it abounded and so spread of a sudden’ (John Rogers, *Jegar-Sahadvtha: an oyled pillar* (London: 1657), p. 54).

³⁵ For examples see W[illiam] B[agwell], *The Distressed Merchant* (London: 1645), A2r; James Parnell, *A collection of the several writings given forth from the Spirit of the Lord through that meek, patient, and suffering servant of God, James Parnel* (London: 1675), B2v.

³⁶ Cf., Matthew Rogers, ‘The instruction of a Father to his Children, which he wrote a few dayes before his burnynge’, in *The Complaynt of Veritie*, ed. by John Bradford (London: 1559), pp. 4-8; Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1317, p. 1721; B[agwell], ‘To his Sonne’, in *The Distressed Merchant*, p. 10; Charles I, *Eikon Basilike* (London: 1649), p. 346, p. 351.

³⁷ Compare R. Andrewes, *A perfect declaration of the barbarous and cruell practises committed by Prince Robert, the Cavalliers, and others in His Majesties army... Collected by R. Andrewes chyrurgion, who is now a prisoner amongst the Cavalliers* (London: 1642), A2v-A3r, with, Anon, *A True relation of two merchants of London, who were taken prisoners by the cavaliers, and of the barbarous cruellty inflicted on them and other prisoners during the time of their captivity* (London: 1642), A2v-A3r. Compare Andrewes, *[C]ruell practises*, A3r-A4r, with, Anon, *A True and perfect relation of... old Brainceford* (London: 1642), pp. 8-11. Compare Andrewes, *[C]ruell practises*, A2v, with, Anon, *An Exact and true relation of a most cruell and horrid murther committed by one of the cavaliers on a woman in Leicester* (London: 1642), A3v-A3r. Such a ‘news-sick fancy’, as St Nicholas termed it in his

sabotage, subterfuge or surveillance on political or religious enemies. This practice was particularly prolific during the Civil War.³⁸ Fourthly and finally, captivity accounts were written to make personal attacks against an author's jailor.³⁹ This was intended to outrage the wider public to rally support for detainees. These *ad hominem* tactics were successful: prison commissions were set up to investigate claims of mistreatment and some jailors were even prosecuted.⁴⁰

Whether written or spoken, there is little doubt that these carceral tales had a substantial readership. Readings and references to prison accounts (especially during the middle of the seventeenth century) can be found in printed sermons, pamphlets, broadsides and even parliamentary debates.⁴¹ Whatever their purpose, many captivity narratives of this period relied on a combination of two primary (but by no means the only) source texts to develop their gruelling depictions of prison life.

The Bible played a central role in the life of early modern English prisoners. As they entered prisons all had to place their hand and swear upon scripture as part of

prison poem 'Upon a Desire after News' (1643), was clearly an important cultural practice for keeping up morale during incarceration (Thomas St Nicholas, 'Upon a Desire after News', line 20, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 31).

³⁸ Inmates proved effective spies, passing on information about strategies and intrigues that they had overheard. Despite the frequent searching of letters and visitors of prisoners, information was channelled through jails in such a way that espionage and disinformation (or 'tampering' as it was known), was endemic amongst the prison population. Cf., Thomas Fairfax, *Memorials of the Civil War: Comprising The Correspondence of the Fairfax Family*, ed. by Robert Bell, 2 vols (London: 1849), I, p. 397; Nathaniel Whetham, *A History of the Life of Colonel Nathaniel Whetham*, ed. by Sir William Cecil Dampier and Catherine Durning Holt Dampier (London: 1907), p. 96; Alfred Kingston, *East Anglia and the Great Civil War* (London: 1897), p. 119; Prince Rupert, *Memoirs of Prince Rupert and the Cavaliers*, ed. by Bartholomew Eliot George Warburton, 3 vols (London: 1849), III, p. 498, p. 519.

³⁹ One example was the printed verse epistle entitled *The Cambridge Royallist Imprisoned* (1643), written by one 'R. B.'. For the infamy of his jailors, this Royalist prisoner stated, will ensure that 'if Ballets bee/But capable of Immortalitie' they 'Shall see thee drest in most vile Tunes, and Rimes' sung by 'Children and Market-maids' and 'Ale-houses' (R. B., *The Cambridge Royallist Imprisoned* (London: 1643), A4v). Similarly, as Thomas Dekker recorded in 1607, one gentleman in Newgate for debt threatened his gaoler to 'Against them would he write *Invectives Satyres, Lybals, Rimes*' to 'pistoll them with paper-bullets shot out of pen & i[n]ke-hornes' (Thomas Dekker, *Jests to make you merie with the conjuring up of Cock Watt, (the walking spirit of Newgate) to tell tales. Unto which is added, the miserie of a prison, and a prisoner* (London: 1607), p. 61, p. 62). Also see John Lilburne, *A copy of a letter written by John Lilburne, close prisoner in the wards of the fleet, which he sent to James Ingram and Henry Hopkins, wardens of the said fleet. Wherin is fully discovered their great cruelty exercised upon his body* (London: 1640), p. 5.

⁴⁰ Cf., Prince Rupert, *Memoirs*, ed. by Warburton, III, p. 507; Charles Carlton, *Going to the Wars: The Experience of the British Civil Wars, 1638–1651* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 246; John Birkenhead, *Newes from Smith the Oxford Jaylor. With the Arraignment of Mercurius Aulicus, Who is Sentenced to Stand in the Pillory Three Market Dayes, For His Notorious Libelling Against State and Kingdome* (London: 1645).

⁴¹ Cf., John Ley, *The (a) fury of warre, and (b) folly of sinne* (London: 1643), p. 46; Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans*, 3 vols (London: 1881), III, p. 67; John Vicars, *The opinion of the Roman iudges touching imprisonment and the liberty of the subject* (London: 1643), p. 13; William Prynne, *The soveraigne power of parliaments* (London: 1643), p. 32; T. B., *Marleborowes miseries* (London: 1643), p. 6.

taking the Oath of Allegiance to the Monarch or (during the middle of the century) the Solemn League and Covenant to Parliament.⁴² The Bible was frequently smuggled or brought into cells to be read, and was often referenced in the writings of inmates.⁴³ In many prisons, the Keeper or his deputy was to read a chapter from scripture and a prayer from the BCP to prisoners twice a day.⁴⁴ Observers even noted how scriptures were to ‘be found writ on our Prison walls’.⁴⁵ ‘Prisons turned into Churches’ as God’s Word was regularly preached by inmates within (to their fellow captives) or without (to the wider public).⁴⁶ Scripture, then, served as a symbolic as well as a material object within English jails. This duality was seen in the fact that a personal copy of the Bible was sometimes taken with the condemned and read at the place of their execution.⁴⁷

The Bible’s significance to prisoners and their writing was also supplemented with another crucial early modern religious text. John Foxe’s late sixteenth-century martyrology *Actes and Monuments of these latter and Perilous Dayes* (1563), or ‘The Book of Martyrs’ as it was more commonly known at the time, was a sweeping survey

⁴² Cf., Samuel Fisher, *One antidote more, against that provoking sin of swearing, by [the] universality of an oath [upon the Bible]... the Quakers objections against it, recommended (by him) to all the prisons in this city* (London: 1660), passim; Daniel Featley, *The league illegal. Wherein the late Solemn League and Covenant is seriously examined* (London: 1660), p. 21. As Fisher points out, the act of making prisoners swear the Oath of Allegiance on the Bible had existed since the reign of James I in an effort to flush out recusants after the Gunpowder Plot. After the Restoration it was used to identify dissenters. Cf., John Griffith, *The case of Mr. John Griffith, Minister of the Gospel and now prisoner in Newgate* (London: 1683), p. 3.

⁴³ For some notable examples see John Taylor, *The unnaturall father, or, The cruell murther committed by [one] John Rowse* (London: 1621), B3r; Edmund Chillenden, *The inhumanity of the Kings prison-keeper at Oxford* (London: 1643), p. 2, p. 11; B[agwell], *The distressed merchant*, B4r; Rogers, *An Oyled Pillar*, p. 6, p. 37; John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (London: 1666), p. 9, p. 17, p. 47, p. 87, passim; Cambers, *Godly Reading*, pp. 221-222.

⁴⁴ Cf., Underdown, *Fire from Heaven*, p. 99. Those like the clergyman Samuel Smith, who was the ordinary at Newgate, were less diligent in this duty. An order was entered in July 1677 by the aldermen stating that he should read prayers to the prisoners twice a day, something he was clearly failing to do (Christopher Chapman, ‘Samuel Smith (1620–1698)’, *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, January 2008).

⁴⁵ Anon, *Gemitus de carcere Nantes, or, Prison-sighs and supports* (London: 1684), p. 6.

⁴⁶ Anon, *A narrative of the cruelties & abuses acted by Isaac Dennis, keeper, his wife and servants, in the prison of Newgate, in the city of Bristol, upon the people of the Lord in scorn called Quakers* (London: 1683), p. 28. A century earlier Foxe had made the same observation that ‘all the prisons in England were become right Christian schooles & Churches’ (Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, (1583), p. 1521). For preaching by and to prisoners see Walter Ashton, *The prisoners plaint a sermon preached by Gualter Ashton, Master of Arts, prisoner in the Kings Bench for debt* (London: 1623), passim; Samuel Clarke, *A Generall Martyrologie* (London: 1651), pp. 400-401; Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent*, p. 61; Ann Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), pp. 147-148; Nigel Smith, ‘Introduction’, in *A Collection of Ranter Writings: Spiritual Liberty and Sexual Freedom in the English Revolution*, ed. by Nigel Smith (London: Pluto Press, 2014), pp. 1-31 (p. 15).

⁴⁷ For the reading of the Bible and/or Prayer Books at the scaffold see Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 2004; Gilbert Dugdale, *A true discourse of the practises of Elizabeth Caldwell... a most excellent exhortorie letter, written by her own selfe out of the prison to her husband* (London: 1604), D2v; Anon, *The cruel mother; being a true relation of the bloody murther committed by M. Cook... with the manner of her execution and demeanour there* (London: 1670), p. 8.

of persecutions from the fourteenth century to the author's present.⁴⁸ Throughout Foxe had skilfully analogised (and abbreviated) English martyrs to their biblical forbears as being one and the same.⁴⁹ This association can even be seen in the title page of *Acts and Monuments* (Figure 1). In doing, Foxe had cemented his text's influence over the minds and memories of prison writers and Bible-readers alike in early modern England.

Firstly, Foxe's text was read alongside and as much as scripture itself by English men and women. As the clergyman Henry Scudder declared, in order to receive 'GODS love and helpe' in the 'greatest persecutions... Reade the *Booke of Martyrs* next unto the *Scriptures* for this purpose'.⁵⁰ This instruction was given in his highly influential Protestant work *The Christians Daily Walke* (1631) which had at least fourteen further editions, the last of which was in 1776. His advice was evidently followed. Foxe's text was keenly read in several Protestant households from the Reformation onwards.⁵¹ The dramatic woodcuts from 'The Book of Martyrs', which could be bought separately (a penny plain or twopence coloured) and stuck on walls, helped cement its popularity.⁵² Some of these were incorporated into the design of cast-iron firebacks within homes. This encouraged families gathered by the fireplace to vividly re-imagine the burnings of martyrs in a kind of lurid performance whilst they listened to readings from Foxe's text.⁵³

Secondly, and more particularly, in seventeenth-century England several prisoner accounts evoked (indirectly or explicitly) 'The Book of Martyrs'. They saw their conditions as comparable to, or worse than those meted out to English Protestants in the reign of Mary I. John Lilburne, in *The poore mans cry... close prisoner in the fleete*

⁴⁸ For a brief overview of the importance of Foxe's work see Thomas S. Freeman, "'Great searching out of bookes and autors': John Foxe as an Ecclesiastical Historian", published PhD thesis, University of Rutgers, *Dissertation Abstract International*, 56.7 (1996), pp. 1-35.

⁴⁹ Cf., Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1250, p. 1572, p. 1712, p. 1783, p. 1849, p. 1921, passim.

⁵⁰ Henry Scudder, *The Christians daily walke* (London: 1631), p. 725.

⁵¹ Cf., Francis Peck, *Desiderata Curiosa*, 2 vols (London: 1732-35), II, p. 39; Margaret Hoby, *The Private Life of an Elizabethan Lady: The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby, 1599-1605*, ed. by Joanna Moody (London: Sutton, 1998), pp. 22-26; Simonds D'Ewes, *The Journal of Sir Simonds D'Ewes from the First Recess of the Long Parliament to the Withdrawal of King Charles from London*, ed. by W. H. Coates (London: 1942), p. 112; Oliver Heywood, *Memoirs of the Rev. Oliver Heywood*, ed. by Richard Slate (Idle: Printed by J. Vint, 1827), p. 273; Henry Newcome, *The Autobiography of Henry Newcome*, ed. by Richard Parkinson, 2 vols (Chetham Society, 1852), I, p. 48; Samuel Clarke, *The lives of sundry eminent persons* (London: 1683), p. 181.

⁵² Patrick Collinson, Arnold Hunt, and Alexandra Walsham, 'Religious Publishing in England, 1557-1640', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, 1557-1695*, ed. by John Barnard and D. F. McKenzie, 6 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), IV, pp. 29-66 (p. 33).

⁵³ Alexandra Walsham, 'History, Memory, and the English Reformation', *The Historical Journal*, 55.4 (2012), pp. 899-939 (p. 932).

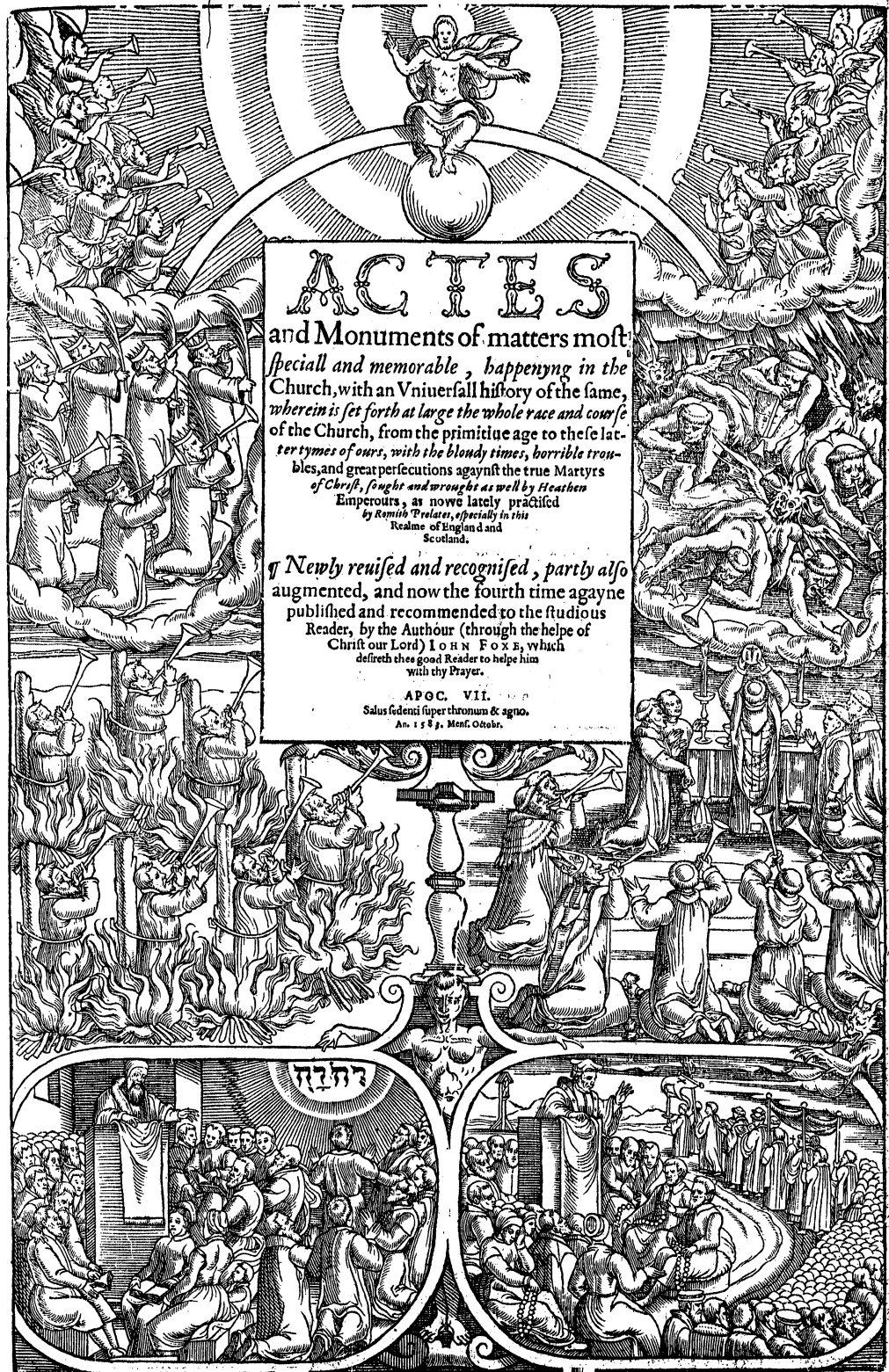


Figure 1. The title page to John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1583). In the bottom left hand corner one can see a sermon being preached to a congregation who have their Bibles opened. In this way, the reading of Foxe's text was directly aligned with the reading of God's Word.

(1639), recalled, ‘I have read a great part of the Booke of *Martyrs*, with some Histories of the like kinde: and I will meaintaine it, that such an unparaleld Act of crueltie and barborous tiranie, as have been exercised upon mee, is not to be found in them all’.⁵⁴ Edward Wirley, a minister and inmate at Oxford Castle, told his readers in his pamphlet *The Prisoners Report* (1642) that what he was about to relate ‘is so sad a story’, being ‘more cruell then those in Queene Maries dayes’, that whoever hears it ‘shall hereafter write a second book of Martyrs’.⁵⁵ After some particular rough handling from his jailors, the Fifth Monarchist John Rogers, imprisoned in Carisbrooke Castle from 1655–1656, stated in his prison treatise *An Oyled Pillar* (1657) ‘that these cruell persecutors [were] so far exceeding them (in this matter) that we read of in the *Book of Martyrs*’.⁵⁶

St Nicholas’ claims about prison life were more nuanced. In a moving passage (whose reference point early modern readers were not likely to miss) he relays that if others saw his prison conditions,

eyes would wring out floods of brinish tears
From direst eyes, would melt an heart of marble.⁵⁷

These emphatic statements evoked those of previous English martyrs like George Tankerfield, a cook from York, who reported of the crowds at his trial that, ‘God did mollify theyr hardened hartes insomuch þ^t some of them departed out of the chamber w^t weping eies’.⁵⁸ Or those like the martyr Richard Woodman, an ironmonger from Sussex, who stated that his prison treatment was so severe that ‘it made my heart melt, and mine eies gush oute with teares’.⁵⁹ St Nicholas deliberately drew on the lexis of ‘heart’, ‘melt’, ‘eyes’, and ‘tears’, in order to conjure up the dramatic prison experience

⁵⁴ John Lilburne, *The poore mans cry Wherein is shewed the present miserable estate of mee John Lilburne, close prisoner in the fleete* (London: 1639), p. 5.

⁵⁵ Edward Wirley, *The prisoners report* (London: 1643), A2v. Such statements were frequently repeated in the parliamentary print culture of the 1640s. For their use in prison pamphlets see Chillenden, *The Inhumanity*, p. 16; Anon, *A perfect relation of the... close prisoners in the Castle of Banbury* (London: 1643), p. 3. For their use in sermons and other polemical tracts see Thomas Hill, *The trade of truth Advanced. In a sermon preached to the Honourable House of Commons, at their solemne fast* (London: 1642), p. 11; Prynne, *The soveraigne power of parliaments*, p. 64; William Gouge, *Mercies memorial set out in a sermon preached in Paul’s church* (London: 1644), pp. 21–22.

⁵⁶ Rogers, *An Oyled Pillar*, p. 46. Italics in original.

⁵⁷ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 538–539, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 26.

⁵⁸ John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1714. All quotations from this text are taken from *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* or TAMO (1583 edition) (Sheffield, HRI Online Publications: 2011).

⁵⁹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 2010.

represented by these martyrs.⁶⁰ Typographically, St Nicholas, like other prison writers, also employed the same epistolic signatures (prison location, month, and year) that were used to end many of the prison letters in ‘The Book of Martyrs’.⁶¹

These examples clearly show the cultural practice of detainees using Foxe’s text, not just to justify their own prison accounts, but elevate them to the status of those Marian victims burnt at the stake. Such literary flourishes broadly gave captivity accounts of the seventeenth century the same patina of spiritual authority that Foxe’s text had enjoyed a century earlier. What we will examine next is how those like St Nicholas evoked the scripturalism of ‘The Book of Martyrs’ through their use of tropes, similes and scriptural shorthand.

Like Sheep to the Slaughter

Most captivity accounts began with the author’s capture and initial treatment. In order to represent this, prison writers used a series of similes that bewailed their captor’s tendency to treat them like beasts of the field. These were taken from a host of scriptures, including:

(Matthew 7.15) Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves,

(Matthew 10.16) Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.

(Psalm 44.22) Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.⁶²

Looking out from his window in Pontefract Castle, St Nicholas invoked all of these to conjure an image of his defeated comrades walking into the prison castle after

⁶⁰ For other variants of this Foxean flourish within prison narratives see Anon, *A True and perfect relation of... old Braineceford*, p. 9; Anon, *A true and most sad relation of... Prisoner[s] at Oxford* (London: 1643), p. 6.

⁶¹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1702, p. 1862, p. 1872; also cf., p. 1537, p. 1669, p. 1698, p. 1777.

⁶² Unless stated otherwise, all quotations of scripture are taken from the King James’ Bible.

the battle at Atherton Moor (30 June 1643). He describes them being ‘driven/Ten miles or twelve barefoot’ whereupon day by day he witnessed,

A thousand more like sheep brought to the fold.⁶³

Yet this prison ‘fold’ was no place of safety. Earlier St Nicholas described how his own arrival was greeted by ‘scoffs’, ‘jeering’ and ‘snapping at’ whereupon the Royalists behaved ‘Like bawling curs’.⁶⁴ He was not the only one to employ this kind of biblical and animal similitude. One ‘R. Andrewes’, a parliamentarian soldier taken prisoner at Edgehill (23 October 1642), the first pitched battle of the Civil War, described how the Royalist army ‘drove them like sheep, whipping them like dogs’ as they marched ‘without stockings or shoes’.⁶⁵ Such stories were not uncommon during the Civil War.⁶⁶

Similar images of prisoner abuse can be found both before and after the 1640s. Outside of the Civil War, prisoners were rarely herded like cattle to prison *en masse*. In their writings, however, prison writers still compared themselves and their treatment to that of vulnerable and preyed-upon livestock. A prisoner in the King’s Bench Prison in 1618 compared the relationship between inmates and their Keepers to that of a ‘sheepe in a terrible storme under a bryar, and be sure thy standing there is to ha[v]e some of thy woo[l] torne off’.⁶⁷ The author extended this metaphor, invoking Psalm 44.22, by characterising such custodians as ‘Butchers’ and their charges a ‘droue of beasts’ who are led ‘to thy slaughter’.⁶⁸ Thomas Dekker, in *[T]he Miserie of a Prison, and a Prisoner* (1607), employed Matthew 7.15 to refer to the languishing condition of the Newgate inmates. He described how they like the ‘Lambe might oftentimes perish for the wolues rauening’.⁶⁹ John Lilburne quoted this same scripture in *Come out of her my people* (1639), written during his captivity in the Fleet. He blamed the bishops for

⁶³ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), line 500, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 25.

⁶⁴ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 267-270, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 20.

⁶⁵ Andrewes, *[C]ruell practises*, A3r.

⁶⁶ Cf., Anon, *A True Relation of Two Merchants*, A4r; Chillenden, *The Inhumanity*, p. 13; Wirley, *The prisoners report*, B1v; John Hodgson, *Autobiography of Captain John Hodgson, of Coley Hall, Near Halifax*, ed. by Joseph Horsfall Turner (1884), p. 100; Anon, *A True and perfect relation of... old Braineceford*, pp. 9-10.

⁶⁷ G. M., *Certaine characters and essayes of prison and prisoners. Compiled by Nouus Homo a prisoner in the kings bench* (London: 1618), C8r.

⁶⁸ G. M., *Certaine characters and essayes of prison and prisoners*, C8r.

⁶⁹ Dekker, *[T]he miserie of a prison, and a prisoner*, p. 35.

his plight, framing himself ‘as one of the Lambes of Christ’ and them as ‘these devouring wolves *Math. 7.15*’ that ‘have hunted and thirsted after my blood, part of which they have gott and yet are not satisfied, but longe to pick my carkeises & bones’.⁷⁰ Embellishing on Matthew 7.15, the Quaker Daniel Baker described himself ‘as a Lamb’ and his prison keepers as ‘a company of Ravenous, Wilde-beasts, Bears, Lions, and devouring Wolves’ when immured in a Worcester prison in 1660.⁷¹ The Quaker Mary Mollineux, who was held prisoner in Lancaster Castle in 1684, wrote of the pursuit to capture and imprison her brethren in similar terms. To Mollineux, paraphrasing Matthew 10.16, dissenters like herself were forced:

To wander, like poor scatter’d Sheep,
Through Desarts far and near;
Hourly in danger to be torn,
By Tyger, Wolf, or Bear,⁷²

The Republican poet George Wither, who was repeatedly imprisoned during his lifetime, said much the same in his *The Prisoners Plea* (1661) composed in Newgate.⁷³ He railed at the Restoration regime’s ‘impoverishing [of] honest and innocent men’, as if ‘Sheep and Lambs, were bred and kept for nothing else, but to be worried for *Doggs meat*’ – a droll paraphrase of Psalm 44.22.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ John Lilburne, *Come out of her my people... By mee John Lilburne. Close prisoner in the Fleete* (London: 1639), p. 32.

⁷¹ D[aniel] B[aker], *The guiltless cries and warnings of... Daniel Baker, by scornors, a Quaker* (London: 1660), p. 18. This biblical imagery really resonated with Quaker prison writers. Quakers during the 1650s were described as ‘Sheep for the slaughter, persecuted, and despised, beaten, stoned, wounded, stocked, whipped, haled out of the Synagogues, and cast into Dungeons, and noysom Vaults, where many of them have dyed in bonds’ (Edward Burrough, *A declaration of the present sufferings of above 140. persons of the people of God (who are now in prison,) called Quakers* (London: 1659), p. 24). In the Winchester common gaol during the 1660s and 70s the Quaker Humphrey Smith described how he was a part of the ‘Persecuting and Imprisoning [of] the Lambs of Christ’ in Worcestershire (Smith, *A collection of the several writings*, p. 7). Similarly, the Quaker John Whitehead saw his imprisonment in Aylesbury in January 1661 as systematic of the ‘open violence to devour thy Lambs’ of Christ (Whitehead, *For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts*, p. 5).

⁷² Mary Mollineux, ‘A Meditation (1668)’, in *Fruits of Retirement* (London: 1702), pp. 21-22. This biblical indictment was shared by earlier prison writers. Imprisoned in Newgate in 1646, Richard Overton accused the Presbyterian House of Commons that had imprisoned him of being ‘wolfish, cannibal’ and like ‘ravening wolves, even as roaring lions wanting their prey’ searching for Lambs ‘they may devour’ (Richard Overton, *An Arrow against All Tyrants* (London: 1646), p. 64).

⁷³ For Wither’s frequent imprisonment see J. Milton French, ‘George Wither in Prison’, *PMLA*, 45.4 (December 1930), pp. 959-966.

⁷⁴ George Wither, *The prisoners plea, humbly offered in a remonstrance with a petition annexed, to the commons of England in Parliament assembled* (London: 1661), pp. 22-23. Daniel Baker echoed Psalm 44.22 to describe himself as a ‘Sheep to the slaughter’ to protest being unjustly thrust into the inner prison

These images were all too familiar to English readers of 'The Book of Martyrs'. For Foxe often cited the exact same scriptures to compare the abuse of Marian martyrs to those of scripture's sacrificial lambs, 'counted as sheep for the slaughter'. Invoking Psalm 44.22, he described how at Colchester in 1557 twenty-two prisoners were 'driven up like a flock of Christen lambes, to London... ready to geve theyr skinnnes to be pluckt of[f] for the Gospels sake'.⁷⁵ This biblical simile was rendered all the more striking by a corresponding woodcut illustration which included a scriptural gloss on this scene (Figure 2). A year earlier the curate of Hockley and martyr William Tyms, explained that saints must prepare and accept 'tribulation, or anguish' as it was written 'For thy sake are wee killed all day long and are counted as sheepe appoynted to bee slayne' (a reference to Psalm 44.22).⁷⁶ Other English martyrs extended and tweaked this biblical symbolism. In a letter of 1555 John Philpot wrote of God's people as the 'simple sheepe of the Lord' who were consigned to the 'butchers stalle' of the bishops.⁷⁷ From his prison cell in the Lollards' Tower during 1556, John Carless often fostered this image in several letters to his fellow Marian martyrs.⁷⁸

Marian prisoners were not confined, however, to citing only Psalm 44 in their prison writings. Committed to the bishop of Winchester's gaol in Southwark, John Marbeck paraphrased Matthew 7.15 by exclaiming, 'ye are become rather bite-sheepes then true byshops, biting and deuouring the poore sheepe of Christ like rauening wolues neuer satisfied with blood'.⁷⁹ 'Looke in the x. of saynct Mathewe,' stated Tyms in a letter, adding 'there shall you see these wordes: Behold I sende you forth as sheepe among Wolues' (Matthew 10.16).⁸⁰

of the Poultry Counter in London in 1659 (D[aniel] B[aker], *A single and general voice lifted up like a trumpet* (London: 1659), p. 8).

⁷⁵ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1971. Foxe himself wrote of the Newbury martyr Julius Palmer, who had been a fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford as one of the appointed 'sheepe to be slaine'. This was the same phrase that Richard Woodman had used to describe himself in his final letter from the Marshalsea prison in 1557 (Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1940, p. 1989; also see p. 1997).

⁷⁶ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1901.

⁷⁷ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1842.

⁷⁸ His epistle to condemned prisoners in Newgate opened with the address of the 'Lords appointed sheepe unto ye slaughter'. Carless remarked, in his correspondence with Augustine Bernher, how the bishops had gone to Oxford Castle as 'bloody butchers bee gone to make slaughter of Christes sheepe that lye there appoynted to be slain'. He wrote to Harry Adlington prisoner in the Lollards Tower that all were to 'suffer for his sake, as one of his seely sheepe appointed to the slaughter' (Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1924, p. 1928, p. 1928).

⁷⁹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1218.

⁸⁰ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1901.



Figure 2. A 'Picture of xxii. godly and faythfull Christians, apprehended about Colchester, prisoned together in one band, and so with three leaders at the most, brought up to London' in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1973.⁸¹ The biblical inscription is taken from Matthew 10.18. Two verses earlier this biblical passage reads 'Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves' (Matthew 10.16).

This scriptural idiom was widely used by other martyrs in their prison letters and speeches.⁸² Foxe concludes that through 'burnynge, hanging, drowning, racking, scourging, and persecuting by secrete practise, and open violence' the 'simple sheepe of our Sauuour Christ' paid the ultimate price of faith.⁸³

Through appropriating the use of Psalm 44.22, Matthew 7.15 and Matthew 10.16 in 'The Book of Martyrs', English prisoner writers of the seventeenth century like St Nicholas were able to connect their hard usage as beleaguered 'Lambes of Christ'

⁸¹ Foxe's image of Marian prisoners tied in pairs, marched and paraded through urban areas, was one that continued in prison accounts of the Civil War. Cf., St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 271-275, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 20; Anon, *Relation of the taking of Cirencester* (London: 1642), A2r; T. B., *Marleborowes miseries*, p. 6; Anon, *A True and perfect relation of... old Braineceford*, p. 10.

⁸² Cf., Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 963, p. 1218, p. 1753.

⁸³ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1934.

(and the rapacity of their captors' as 'devouring Wolves') to those of their persecuted forebears.⁸⁴ By these allusions English prisoners embodied their dual roles as sacrificial lambs and combatants for Christ. As the Baptist Hercules Collins stated in his *A Voice from the Prison* (1684), a text composed during his time in Newgate, 'if we Suffer with him' that is Christ, who – in St John's vision in Revelations 5.6 'stood [as] a Lamb as it had been slain' – then 'we shall be Glorified together'.⁸⁵

Small, Dark and Crowded Cells

Complaints of small, overcrowded and nearly pitch-black cells were also familiar fare. Such scenes were meant to correspond to the 'miserable Dungeon' (as the clergyman William Bates called it)⁸⁶ that the Apostles Paul and Silas were thrown into by the Jewish authorities at Philippi:

(Acts 16.23-24) And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the *inner prison*, and made their feet fast in the stocks.⁸⁷

Similar scenes were evoked by English detainees. St Nicholas tells the story of how the Keeper at Pontefract Castle for one prisoner,

had in a dungeon deep
Put him six yards within the ground, though keep
Him there they did (perhaps they durst) not, long;⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Civil War prisoners could cheer themselves that they, unlike their persecuted forebears, were only treated like and not fed to 'wilde beastes' as Foxe frequently mentions. Cf., Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 86, p. 783, p. 1597, p. 2041.

⁸⁵ Hercules Collins, *A voice from the prison* (London: 1684), p. 17; also see Hercules Collins, *Counsel for the living* (London: 1684), p. 28.

⁸⁶ William Bates, *A short description of the blessed place and state of the saints above* (London: 1687), p. 29. For the general acceptance of the squalid and strait conditions of Paul and Silas' cell see Richard Rogers, *Certain sermons preached and penned by Richard Rogers* (London: 1612), p. 12; Richard Baxter, *The saints everlasting rest* (London: 1650), p. 451; John Edwards, *A discourse concerning the authority, stile, and perfection of the books of the Old and New-Testament* (London: 1693), p. 91.

⁸⁷ Italics my emphasis.

⁸⁸ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 357-359, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 22.

While ‘clapped up’ in Sheffield, on his way to Pontefract, St Nicholas himself also witnessed how,

some
Amongst us, what with closeness of the room
(Ten of us packed together)
[...]
did grow sick⁸⁹

St Nicholas, however, did not have to endure the kind of cramped conditions to which the other inmates of Pontefract castle were subjected. He contemplated:

To think what piteous lodging these poor men
Had by such heaps [laid together],⁹⁰

Lodgings for parliamentary inmates at Oxford that year appeared equally appalling. Edmund Chillenden related how he was thrust into ‘so little [a] Roome’ with forty other men whereby ‘we were forced to lie one upon another’.⁹¹ This ensured that ‘many fell sick and very weak in body’.⁹² Royalist captives had no better accommodation whilst locked up. Royalist newsbooks often depicted the Roundhead prisons as cruelly cramped ones. Bruno Ryves reported such a case in *Mercurius Rusticus* of the plight of one ‘Mr Chaldwell’ at Lincoln Castle in July 1643. Chaldwell was thrown into a cell so cramped that sharing it with three other prisoners only one ‘could lye downe at once, [while] the rest must stand’.⁹³ Peter Heylyn represented similar scenes when editing the popular Royalist newsbook *Mercurius Aulicus*. A month after Ryves’ report of Chaldwell, Heylyn described how inmates held in Portsmouth were not even able ‘to stand upright’.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 231-233, 235, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 20.

⁹⁰ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 507-508, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 26.

⁹¹ Chillenden, *The Inhumanity*, p. 3.

⁹² Chillenden, *The Inhumanity*, p. 3. Whereas St Nicholas added the happier ending that ‘At length/One did [get] remove[d] till he got further strength’, Chillenden has the chilling flourish of how one ‘man died’ (St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 241-242, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 20; Chillenden, *The Inhumanity*, p. 4). For a similar account see Wirley, *The prisoners report*, A3r.

⁹³ Bruno Ryves, *Mercurius Rusticus*, 29/07-4/08/43 (Oxford: 1643), p. 76.

⁹⁴ Peter Heylyn, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 6-12/08/43 (Oxford: 1643), p. 436. That August Heylyn again wrote of some of the King’s men, held in a prison ship in Wapping, that were ‘not able to stand upright, or

Descriptions of packed and suffocating prison lodgings continued throughout the seventeenth century. Lilburne complained that in the Fleet in 1639 being in a ‘close roome lockt up’ ensured his ‘health [was] being impaired for want of aire’, so much so that it gave him a constant headache.⁹⁵ Christopher Feake in *The oppressed close prisoner* (1654), composed during his time in Windsor Castle, described how he was cast with ‘some other Brethren into Prison’ in rooms so small that they were ‘shut up in a very narrow compass from the common air’.⁹⁶ John Rogers in *An Oyled Pillar* (1657) described at Carisbrooke Castle being kept in ‘a little, lowe, dark room, where was very little air’.⁹⁷ In 1659 the wife of the Quaker Henry Streaters could barely move as she was ‘constrained to a little bad Ro[o]me’, where eight more were being kept in a holding cell in Hampshire.⁹⁸ Four years later, in the same prison, the Quaker Humphrey Smith described his shared cell, just ‘four Inches wide’, as ‘so dark, and so close, and so many in so little room, and so little Air’, for fourteen weeks.⁹⁹ The Baptist Henry Adis described how in his cell in London in the early 1660s there were ‘first nine, and after twelve of us together, scarce able to lie down one by another’ in a place with ‘without

enjoy any aire, (all the auger holes most maliciously being stopt up) crowded all together in darkness’ (Heylyn, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 13-19/08/43 (Oxford: 1643), p. 448). Similarly, George Bate condemned the imprisonment of Royalists ‘upon *Ship-board*, in such narrow Cabbins, and other places provided on purpose, that they had not roome to stand upright, or lie at length, untill even their Sinews shrunk’ (George Bate, *The regall apology, or, The declaration of the Commons, Feb. 11, 1647, canvassed wherein every objection and their whole charge against His Majesty is cleared, and for the most part, retorted* (London: 1648), p. 60).

⁹⁵ Lilburne, *Come out of her my people*, p. 31, p. 13.

⁹⁶ Christopher Feake, *The oppressed close prisoner in Windsor-Castle* (London: 1654), A2r.

⁹⁷ Rogers, *An Oyled Pillar*, p. 6. Rogers was somewhat of an itinerant prisoner. He was first arrested in the summer of 1654 and kept in Lambeth Palace. Within the space of year, he was then transferred to Windsor Castle, then to Arten House via Sandham Castle on the Isle of Wight, until finally resting in Carisbrooke Castle. Cf., Richard L. Greaves, ‘Rogers, John (b. 1627)’, *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, January 2008.

⁹⁸ Burrough, *A declaration of the present sufferings of above 140. persons of the people of God (who are now in prison,) called Quakers*, p. 3. Claustrophobic, sunless (and seemingly airless) cells were also experienced by convicted felons. Cf., Anon, *A relation of the sufferings of William Dobson of Slade-end* (London: 1680), p. 9; Anon, *The confession and execution as well of the several prisoners that suffered at Tyburn* (London: 1678), p. 6.

⁹⁹ Smith, *A collection of the several writings*, B2v, B3r. Twenty Quakers were imprisoned in Bristol in 1683 and kept in a round room (with a ‘Nineteen Foot Diamiter’) that was ‘so dark, that they could not see to eat their Food in the day time, but by Candle Light’ (Anon, *A narrative of the cruelties & abuses acted by Isaac Dennis, keeper*, p. 9). Similarly, the Quaker martyr James Parnell – who later died in prison after having refused to eat – was sent to Colchester Castle and ‘cast [into a] little low Hole, call’d the *Oven* (which place was so Little, that some Bakers Ovens have been seen Bigger then it, though not so high) without the least Air, Hole or Window’ (Parnell, *A collection of the several writings*, A2v). Scottish Quakers fared no better. Robert Barclay described the ‘malicious barbarity’ acted upon himself and other Friends arrested in Aberdeen in March 1676. He relates how the authorities ‘thronged up fifteen of us in two narrow, stinking holes, where each of us have not so much room as could not be denied us in the grave-yard, and so are forced to lie one above another’ (qtd. in Alexander Jaffray, *Diary of Alexander Jaffray... To which are Added Particulars of his Subsequent Life*, ed. by John Barclay (London: 1834), p. 388).

either Light or Air'.¹⁰⁰ Regardless of their crimes, there was broad truth to these bleak descriptions. The Baptist Henry Denne wrote in 1660 that the 'Prisons in Cities and Countreys [by which he means "Counties"] are so full, that there is hardly any more room'.¹⁰¹

Descriptions of close-quarter living in prison cells were meant to evoke those experienced by biblical prisoners. Hercules Collins assured his fellow Baptists at Newgate that their cramped conditions were the same as Christ's Apostles. '[M]any of the Saints were shut up in Prison, probably very close Prisoners they were', Collins asserted, adding, '*Paul and Silas* was put into the Inner Prison, and their feet made fast in the stocks, *Peter* was bound in Prison, bound with two Chains'.¹⁰² Rogers, locked away at Carisbrooke, also quoted Acts 16.23-24 to show how he could be content because Paul and Silas '*were thrust into the Inner prison: but there they sang Praises*'.¹⁰³ Imprisoned in Lancaster Castle, Mollineux could like Paul and Silas 'to his [God's] Name high Praises sing'.¹⁰⁴ This in spite of the 'proudest Walls... Gates, Bars, nor all/The Art of Man, [to] sup[p]ress the Cries and Call... Of *Israel's* Seed'.¹⁰⁵ Despite being tied 'b[y] the hands/With bolts and locks together' at Pontefract Castle, St Nicholas could like the Apostle Paul state 'cheerfully I suffered to the end'.¹⁰⁶

Images of claustrophobic and putrid prisons could be traced back to those within 'The Book of Martyrs'. For many of the Marian prisoners complained about the poor state of their lodgings. One of the Coventry martyrs Robert Glover thought it deplorable that his cell was tiny, 'very cold with small light'.¹⁰⁷ John Philpot complained of his lodgings in the Lollards' Tower, or the bishop of London's coalhouse, as a 'darke closet... so vile & strait a place' which continually experienced the 'want of light' (Figure 3). The martyr George Marsh was flung 'in a cold windy

¹⁰⁰ Henry Adis, *A fannaticks letter sent out of the dungeon of the gate-house prison of Westminster* (London: 1661?), p. 6.

¹⁰¹ Henry Denne, *An epistle recommended to all the prisons in this city & nation* (London: 1660), p. 2. For similar descriptions in European prison narratives printed in the English press see Master Ramon, *Two letters: One written... by Master Ramon, a minister of the word of God, being prisoner in the citie of Valencia, to his wife being in London* (London: 1603), C1r; J. P., *Battering rams against Rome; or... a prisoner in the inquisition-prison of Rome* (London: 1661), p. 129.

¹⁰² Collins, *Counsel for the living*, p. 24.

¹⁰³ Rogers, *An Oyled Pillar*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁴ Mary Mollineux, 'Meditations concerning our Imprisonment only for Conscience-sake, 1684, in Lancaster Castle', in *Fruits of Retirement*, p. 103.

¹⁰⁵ Mollineux, 'Meditations concerning our Imprisonment', in *Fruits of Retirement*, pp. 103-104.

¹⁰⁶ St Nicholas, *For My Son*, lines 395-396, 413, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 23-24. St Nicholas' line is reminiscent of Paul's remark as one 'Who now rejoice in my sufferings' (Colossians 1.24).

¹⁰⁷ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1736.

stone house... where [there] was little roome'.¹⁰⁸ In the summer of 1556 Julius Palmer was brought 'into a vile, stinkyng, and blynd dungeon' in Reading where he was barely able to move 'hangyng by the hands and feete in a paire of stocks'.¹⁰⁹ In 1558 at Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, Richard Yeoman and John Dale 'were throwne into ye lowest dungeon' which was so small and putrid that the latter died from illness.¹¹⁰ As was the case with 'John Alcocke' who in Newgate, 'was caste into the lower dungeon, where with euill keping & sickenes of the house, he died in prison'.¹¹¹ When the wives of a local shoemaker and brewer ('Joane Trunchfielde' and 'Anne Potten' respectively) were thrown into Ipswich prison in the autumn of 1555, they so struggled to 'endure the straitnesse of the prisone' that the latter suffered from 'marueilous great agonies and troubles of minde'.¹¹² Similarly, in the spring of that year the martyr Rawlins White, a Welsh fisherman, was cast into Cardiff Castle which was said to be 'a very darck lothsome, and most vile prison'.¹¹³ He was burnt at the stake a few months later.

By depicting their cells as gloomy, cold and tightly confined spaces, St Nicholas and other prison writers were re-presenting the carceral scenes found in Foxe's text. This was an attempt to reveal the sufferings of Marian, Jacobean and Caroline prisoners as one and the same. In this way prisoner writers of the seventeenth century could align their experience of captivity with those of Foxe's martyrs – although not their martyrdom. Such accounts also, implicitly or explicitly, evoked the close confinement of biblical prisoners such as Paul and Silas. With this came the recognition and status of being a part of the legacy of martyrs who had suffered for the Christian faith.

Stripped or Naked

English prison narratives then moved on to discuss routine stripping and nakedness. In doing so, many were knowingly drawing parallels between themselves and the carceral experiences of the Apostle Paul. For in 2 Corinthians 11.27 he described being 'in cold and in nakedness' as a frequent condition of his various imprisonments under the Jewish

¹⁰⁸ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1833, p. 1798, p. 1833, p. 1562.

¹⁰⁹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1937.

¹¹⁰ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 2045.

¹¹¹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 2046.

¹¹² Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1704.

¹¹³ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1558.



Figure 3. This woodcut represents, ‘Maister Philpot beyng in the Colehouse, where he found Thomas Whittle Priest, sittying in the Stockes’ in John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1797. Darkness and squalor pervade this small and claustrophobic prison cell. Philpot (figured sitting on the left) repeatedly remarked upon the dingy and murky quality of the coalhouse prison. It was ‘a blind Colehouse... without fire & candle’, ‘a Colehouse of darkenesse’, and ‘a darke and a ugly prison as any is about London’.¹¹⁴ The straw on the floor at the bottom of the woodcut reveals the close-knit and poor sleeping conditions these inmates shared. Such prison surroundings are all tied to the suffering of biblical martyrs, as Philpot is holding a book in his hand which symbolises the Bible.

authorities.¹¹⁵ St Nicholas follows this biblical tradition when at Pontefract he describes the men captured after the taking of Howley Hall (22 June 1643) as:

To see poor men stripped to their shirts and driven
Ten miles or twelve barefoot, some six or seven

¹¹⁴ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1810, p. 1834, p. 1839.

¹¹⁵ It should be noted that this passage was also used by later prison writers of the seventeenth century. Cf., Richard Coppin, *A blow at the serpent; or a gentle answer from Madiston prison to appease wrath* (London: 1656), A3r.

Tied by the thumbs together, some, that stood
 With shirts like boards stiffened with cold gore blood,
 Surbate and lamed i'the feet with walking bare,¹¹⁶

A few days later he observes more captives held 'nak'd in their sorry den' who from
 'sad wives and friends',

could scarce (such was the keeper's hate)
 Get leave to bring them sorry rags t'the grate;¹¹⁷

Deprivations of this kind were commonly depicted in other Civil War prison tracts and diaries. Imprisoned in Oxford Castle, the clergyman Edward Wirley related in his *The Prisoners Report* (1643) how the parliamentary troops after their defeat at the Battle of Cirencester (2 February 1643) were 'most of them... stripped of their Cloathes, some of their very shirts'.¹¹⁸ In his diary Captain John Hodgson declared that after being overrun by the Royalists in early 1643, 'myself was stript into my shirt, and driven in amongst the rest' as he was forced to march from Bradford to Leeds barefoot.¹¹⁹

These representations, however, were not exclusive to the 1640s. An inmate of the King's Bench Prison lamented in 1618 that if a prisoner had no money to pay for food and lodging then his jailors 'by violence will take cloake, or doublet, and turne you out naked' into the common halls of the prison.¹²⁰ John Lilburne described his time in the Fleet in 1639 as one of 'scarcity', 'want' and 'nakednesse'.¹²¹ A similar scene occurs in the play *Amanda: or, The Reformed Whore* (1635), written by Thomas

¹¹⁶ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 491-495, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 25.

¹¹⁷ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 511-512, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 26.

¹¹⁸ Wirley, *The prisoners report*, B1v.

¹¹⁹ Hodgson, *Autobiography*, ed. by Turner, p. 100. Similarly, Colonel John Birch related in his memoirs the lamentable condition of his captured soldiers in September 1644. He describes them as barely dressed 'drenched with the storms' and 'forced through the mire', giving his men the epithet of 'my poor naked foot' (Birch, *Memoirs*, ed. by Webb, pp. 93-94).

¹²⁰ G. M., *Certaine characters and essayes of prison and prisoners*, D2r. The extortion of raising the chamber rents of prisoners was curbed towards the end of the seventeenth century. Cf., Anon, *Some considerations humbly offered, in relation to the bill now depending in Parliament for the further relief of creditors in cases of escape* (London: 1698), passim.

¹²¹ Lilburne, *Come out of her my people*, p. 24. Some agreed that the Fleet was the worst of London's prisons, and the King's Bench Prison one of the best. Cf., J. Knap., *An encomium upon that most accomplished gentleman, Stephen Mosdel ... as also a short narrative or anatomie of the Fleet-prison, Newgate, and both the compters* (London: 1671), p. 10.

Cranley whilst in the King's Bench Prison. The eponymous protagonist is arrested for prostitution and taken to the whipping post where:

Thy clothes pul'd downe, starke naked to thy waste.

As if to reflect the gross perversion of her trade, and like the inmates lodged with Cranley, she is then left:

Bare legg'd, not having shooes unto thy feete,
Nor any thing, to put upon thy head.
Scarce rags to keepe thy secrets covered,¹²²

After the Restoration the suspected Jesuit William Houlbrook, imprisoned in Newgate, related in his tract *A Black-Smith and No Jesuite* (1660) how the prison authorities 'pulled my coat from my back for fees' to pay his rent for the dungeon he was in.¹²³ A debtor in Newgate in Middlesex described in his *A Companion for Debtors and Prisoners* (1699) how the Common Hall where inmates shared beds was one in which 'some lay naked, others with shav'd Heads without any Caps upon [th]em'; and in another room 'a Woman almost naked and perish'd'.¹²⁴ The Quaker preacher Humphrey Smith described being 'twice stript naked and whipt with Rods' before being thrown into Bridewell prison.¹²⁵ As one contemporary chronicler observed, when touring Ludgate in 1659, such was the need for garments in English jails, that 'if a man had been buried at the charge of the [Prison] House' then 'his clothes, [or] bedding (if they have any)' were by the 'Stewards and Assistants exposed to sale' amongst the indigent inmates.¹²⁶

¹²² Thomas Cranley, *Amanda: or, The reformed whore. Composed, and made by Thomas Cranley gent. now a prisoner in the Kings-bench* (London: 1635), p. 59, p. 60.

¹²³ William Houlbrook, *A black-smith and no Jesuite* (London: 1660), p. 67. The nonconformist Isaac Grayes, lodged in the Wood-street Compter in London, said in his prison tract *One Out-Cry More Against Tythes* (1657) that he almost perished from 'nakedness'. This was made worse in that it was so cold in his cell that he 'could not come to receive the benefit of the heat of fire for the space of two Yeers and seven months' (Isaac Grayes, *One out-cry more against tythes... by Isaac Grayes, prisoner for the cause of Christ in the Wood-street Compter, London* (London: 1657), p. 13).

¹²⁴ E. S., Gentleman in Prison, *A companion for debtors and prisoners* (London: 1699), p. 12, p. 24; also see p. 16.

¹²⁵ Smith, *A collection of the several writings*, p. 164.

¹²⁶ Marmaduke Johnson, *Ludgate, what it is, not what it was, or, A full and clear discovery and description of... that prison* (London: 1659), p. 71. For examples of stripping and nakedness in European

Evoking the Apostle Paul's condition of being in 'cold and in nakedness', these images were reminiscent of those in 'The Book of Martyrs', for, as we have stressed, Foxe's text was the progenitor of early modern prison writing. Foxe describes how prohibited English translations of the Apostle Paul's prison letters were often bought, read, memorised and preached by persecuted Protestants.¹²⁷ It is no surprise, then, that many Marian captives echoed Paul's prison sentiments when their clothing was stripped or ripped away from them. John Philpot stated that he was in the Lollards' Tower, 'manye tymes stripped and searched in the prison' as was William Downton (a friend of the martyr John Hooper) whilst in the Fleet in 1553.¹²⁸ Foxe records how when Thomas Cranmer, once archbishop of Canterbury, was escorted to prison in 1556, 'they stripped him out of his gown into his jacket, and put upon him a pore yeoman Bedles gowne, full bare and nearely worne'.¹²⁹ In 1558 Richard Wilmot and Thomas Fairfax were 'stripped from the wa[i]st upward' and 'scourged' with a whip in Draper's Hall before going to be burned.¹³⁰ These humiliations were routinely practised as English martyrs were often stripped before being lashed, hung or burnt at the stake.¹³¹

The indecency that naked and semi-naked English prisoners related during the seventeenth century had a direct link, not only historically to those inmates who had fought to usher in the English Reformation, but biblically to the prison hardships of one who had fought to propagate a then fledgling Christianity – the Apostle Paul. Descriptions of naked prisoners did not make them appear vulnerable and enfeebled. Instead Protestant readers would have recognised a state of 'nakedness' as a hallmark of martyrdom and not one of shame and sin. Only once inmates had been stripped bare, figuratively and literally, could they truly testify to the all-sufficiency of Christ.

Bread and Water

Prison authors in England were also keen to assert their malnutrition and dehydration whilst locked away. Two key scriptural texts provided the precedent for such treatment:

prisons, that were printed in the English press at the time, see J. P., *Battering rams against Rome* (London: 1661), p. 129.

¹²⁷ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 814, p. 819, p. 824, p. 829, p. 836, p. 906, *passim*.

¹²⁸ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1830, p. 1506.

¹²⁹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1883.

¹³⁰ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 2060.

¹³¹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 906, p. 1229, p. 1507, p. 1679, p. 1769, p. 2061, p. 2113, p. 2152, *passim*.

(Jeremiah 38.6, 9) Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire... My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city.

(1 Kings 22.27) Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction.¹³²

The latter of these passages was uttered by Ahab, the idolatrous King of Israel, when he disapproved of what God's prophet Micaiah had to say about his wicked rule. The former passage refers to the imprisonment of the prophet Jeremiah by King Zedekiah for casting similar reproofs. Taken together these biblical verses were used to signal that those who endured similar pangs of hunger and thirst (whether metaphorically or literally) were suffering for Christ.¹³³

St Nicholas appears to have had such scriptures in mind when he describes how at Pontefract Castle some inmates were so thirsty as to be:

Begging for water for God's sake¹³⁴

With his sorrow:

¹³² Variants of this verse included Isaiah 30.20, 'And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers'. This biblical verse was popular and often paraphrased by godly poets. Cf., Zacharie Boyd, *The Garden of Zion* (Glasgow: 1644), p. 312.

¹³³ Such expressions may also have been proverbial. William Cavendish's lament for the defeated Royalist forces ran, 'So water wee le drinke, and bite a hard Cruste' (William Cavendish, first Duke of Newcastle, 'A Song', in *Poetry and Revolution: An Anthology of British and Irish Verse 1625–1660*, ed. by Peter Davidson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), pp. 316–317 (p. 316)). They may have also been literal. Some families actually elected to have such a slender diet as a mark of their godliness. The politician and civic reformer Ignatius Jurdain was often recorded as saying at his dinner table: '*Brown bread and Kennel water is good fare with the Gospel*'. This was an aphorism he was said to have borrowed from the influential English Reformer and clergyman Richard Greenham (Ferdinando Nicolls, *The life and death of Mr. Ignatius Jurdain* (London: 1655), A2r).

¹³⁴ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), line 496, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 25.

To see one knocked for reaching in his hand
 A cup of water to a pris'ner, and
 Another chid for dealing out in bowls
 A little milk to those distressed souls;¹³⁵

St Nicholas compares the gaunt condition of these 'distressed souls' to how he observed,

To see wat loads of plundered goods were brought
 [...]

when many loads together
 Of bread were kept so long till it was grown
 Not fit for man nor beast, but to be thrown
 Out into ditches¹³⁶

This ensured that not just captives, but the local 'Poor famers' children' surrounding the castle prison, did in vain:

Beg some o' the bread¹³⁷

These scenes, both before, during and after St Nicholas wrote his prison poem were familiar ones. Some, like St Nicholas, observed the denial of water to inmates. Chillenden relayed how the prisoners at Oxford Castle in 1643 were beaten for at times 'stooping to take a piece of Ice to hold in their mouths to quench their violent thirst'.¹³⁸ During the mid-1650s the Quaker James Parnell had to suffer his Keepers who 'would not let him have any Victuals brought to him' and other times 'would set Prisoners to take away such Victuals as was brought to him'.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 503-506, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 25.

¹³⁶ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 513, 530-533, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 26.

¹³⁷ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 534, 536, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 26.

¹³⁸ Chillenden, *The Inhumanity*, p. 3. For similar representations during the 1640s see Anon, *A true and most sad relation*, p. 5, p. 4; Wirley, *The prisoners report*, A3r-A3v, A4r; Anon, *A True and perfect relation of... old Braineceford*, p. 8; Anon, *A True Relation of Two Merchants*, A3r; Heylyn, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 27/08-1/09/43 (Oxford: 1643), p. 483.

¹³⁹ Parnell, *A collection of the several writings*, A2r.

Like St Nicholas too, prisoners wrote of their savage hunger as well as thirst. Some took a literal reading of 1 Kings 22.27 by using the phrase ‘bread and water’ to sum up the pittance of their daily or even weekly prison provisions. An inmate of the King’s Bench Prison complained in 1618 that there a ‘poore prisoner [must] fast a week with bread and water’.¹⁴⁰ In the Winchester common gaol in 1663 Humphrey Smith described how his cell mates could only get ‘Bread from our Friends, and Water’.¹⁴¹ He went as far as to compare this ‘want of Bread and Water’ with that of Christ and his forty days in the desert.¹⁴²

Some prison writers used 1 Kings 22.27 more figuratively. The Welsh Baptist Vavasor Powell wrote from the Fleet prison in *The Bird in the Cage* (1661) that he suffered gladly for ‘doing the work to which I was called’ even ‘though I were to be fed with bread & water’.¹⁴³ A fellow Baptist Hercules Collins in his prison tract *Counsel for the Living* (1684) assured his fellow prisoners in Newgate that though they may think their provisions ‘hard, unjust, yea, unmerciful’ yet ‘we are not alone’.¹⁴⁴ He went on to cite the meagre prison diet of Micaiah and Jeremiah:

saith *Ahab*, of the good Prophet *Micaiah*, *Put this Fellow in Prison, and feed him with the Bread of Affliction, and water of affliction...* Good *Jeremiah* is not without his share, for he was put into the Cells or Cabines, and let down with Cords into a dark dungeon, where was no water, but mire, wherein the Prophet sunk.¹⁴⁵

Those like Wither used such scriptures in *The Prisoners Plea* (1661) to turn his physical impoverishment in prison into spiritual empowerment. He warned his enemies that ‘*Micah* though, feared, hated and persecuted by *Ahab*’, as God’s prophet ‘he was more safe in Prison with bread and water of affliction’ than Ahab whose ‘fortified... Armies’

¹⁴⁰ G. M., *Certaine characters and essayes of prison and prisoners*, D1r. In 1660 the suspected Jesuit Houlbrook begged the authorities not to send him back to Newgate as he described how ‘the allowance of the Prison is but bread and water’ (Houlbrook, *A black-smith and no Jesuite*, p. 80).

¹⁴¹ Smith, *A collection of the several writings*, B2v.

¹⁴² Smith, *A collection of the several writings*, p. 273. However, it should be noted that prisoners, from Marian to Caroline, would sometimes deliberately fast on ‘bread and water’, hoping to accrue spiritual blessings. Cf., Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 838, p. 983, p. 1904, p. 2040; G. M., *Certaine characters... of prison and prisoners*, D1r; William Jenkyn, *A sermon preached at Mary Aldermanbury... Being the first sermon he preached since his releasement* (London: 1651), p. 1.

¹⁴³ Vavasor Powell, *The bird in the cage* (London: 1661), A6v.

¹⁴⁴ Collins, *Counsel for the living*, p. 24.

¹⁴⁵ Collins, *Counsel for the living*, p. 24.

did not ‘defend them’ from the wrath of God.¹⁴⁶ Lilburne, in the Fleet in 1639, was just as defiant. He paraphrased Jeremiah 38.9 to prove that he was not to ‘starve & rott in Prison’ because ‘as long as there was a piece of bread in the baker’s street, Jeremiah wanted not in his distresses, and I know Jeremiahs God is my God’.¹⁴⁷

As observers pointed out, whether metaphoric or literal, such miserly portions for prisoners were both unnecessary and cruel.¹⁴⁸ Basic rations were paid for by money from the prison’s ‘Alms Box’ (given by wealthy patrons and visitors), from the ‘Common Stock or Bank’ (given from the sale of charitable goods to the prison), and from the ‘Table money’ (given by prisoners themselves when they first arrived).¹⁴⁹ Prisoners did have to pay for their own food and victuals, but for those who could or did not, it is incredible to think that many survived on these basic rations.¹⁵⁰ The only official documents that I have found which sanctioned such a reduced diet for prisoners, were as punishment for acts of blasphemy, pillage or drunkenness committed by soldiers. For instance, in Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel’s, *Laws and Ordinances of War* (1639) written for the King’s Army during the First Bishops’ War (1639), first time offenders of blasphemy were to spend three days in prison fed with ‘bread and water’

¹⁴⁶ Wither, *The prisoners plea*, p. 26. Wither had experienced prison malnutrition before. When locked up in the Marshalsea in 1621 he bemoaned, ‘I was for many dayes compelled to feed on nothing but the coursest bread, and sometymes lockt upp foure and twenty howers together, without so much as a dropp of water to coole my tongue’ (George Wither, *The Scholars Purgatory* (London: 1624), p. 3).

¹⁴⁷ Lilburne, *Come out of her my people*, p. 23. Such providential provisions did occur. When imprisoned in Clarken-well Prison in 1654, the Baptist Roger Crab told of how, (when he was denied bread by his Keeper), ‘walking in the Prison yard, there came a Spannell and walked after him three or foure turnes, with a peece of bread in his mouth’ (Roger Crab, *The English hermite, or, Wonder of this age* (London: 1655), p. 3).

¹⁴⁸ The starvation of prisoners appears to have been particularly endemic during the 1640s. After the siege of Arundel Castle in 1644 one parliamentary observer was shocked, when the ‘prisoners march out’, how ‘I never saw so many weake and feeble creatures together in my life... halfe starved, and many of them hardly able to set one foot before another’ (Anon, *A wicked plot against the person of Sir William Waller...* (London: 1644), pp. 862-863)). Parliament’s treatment of its captives was no better. Imprisoned in London, the Jesuit John Abbot Rivers indicted the Commons with these words, ‘How many starv’d in prisons thither sent,/Even for no crimes, at your commandement?/And being petition’d for poore men in clogs,/You cryde out, “let ’em famish, hang ’em dogs”’ (J[ohn] A[bbot] Rivers, *Devout rhapsodies* (London: 1647), p. 77). The mismanagement by either side of an inmate’s diet was summed up pithily by another London prisoner James Freize, ‘So men in prison daily make complaint;/How they with grief and hunger pine and faint’ (James Freize, *Every mans right: or, Englands perspective-glasse* (London: 1646), p. 10).

¹⁴⁹ Johnson, *Ludgate*, pp. 20-22. Such gaunt prison rations of ‘bread and water’ were described in contemporary prison narratives that took place as far flung as Africa. Cf., T. S., *The adventures of (Mr. T.S.) an English merchant taken prisoner by the Turks of Argiers* (London: 1670), p. 191.

¹⁵⁰ The Ranter Abiezer Coppe described how ‘Mine eares are filled brim full with cryes of poore prisoners, Newgate, Ludgate cryes (of late) are seldome out of mine eares. Those dolefull cryes, *Bread, bread, bread* for the Lords sake, pierce mine eares, and heart, I can no longer forebeare’. Coppe did not expect his readers to take his word for it, but rather insisted that, ‘Werefore high you apace to all prisons in the Kingdome’ (Coppe, *A fiery flying roll*, p. 7).

only.¹⁵¹ Most of the prisoners quoted above were dieted on such meagre fare for considerably longer than this. The inhumanity of such prison rations becomes clearer when one considers that an allowance of ‘only Bread and Water’ was the daily portion of ‘galley slaves’ on the Continent.¹⁵² It is worth noting, however, that the daily portion of bread given to prisoners doubled between Marian and Stuart accounts of imprisonment.¹⁵³

These complaints of prison malnutrition, which were both literal and figurative, were nothing new. For Henrician and Marian martyrs wrote of suffering similar bodily wants and pangs. Just as above, biblical passages such as 1 Kings 22.27 came to stand in ‘The Book of Martyrs’ as one of the many repeated signs of righteous affliction if prisoners were like: ‘Micheas [Micaiah] was buffeted and fed with bread and water’.¹⁵⁴ This is why Anne Askew quoted it. She exclaimed, ‘God hath geuen me the bread of aduersitie, and the water of trouble’ in her letter to King Henry VIII as well as in her execution speech.¹⁵⁵ The experience of other martyrs signalled a variant or shorthand of this scripture. Foxe describes how Robert Samuel in a jail in Norwich in 1555 was ‘euery day allowed 2. or 3. mouthfuls of bread, and 3. sponefuls of water’.¹⁵⁶ This caused him to fall into a temporary coma.¹⁵⁷ In London Thomas Whittle was threatened that if he did not recant he would be ‘fedde with bread and water’ only.¹⁵⁸ The Canterbury martyr Alice Benden, who was kept in ‘Mondaies Hole’ an underground vault in the bishop’s prison in 1556, was fed for nine weeks on just ‘bread and water’ where she became ‘a most pitious and lothsome creature to beholde’.¹⁵⁹ One of the Islington martyrs Thomas Hinshaw was imprisoned in Newgate in the summer of 1558

¹⁵¹ Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel and Surrey, *Laws and Ordinances of War, For the Better Government of His Majesty’s Army Royal in the Present Expedition for the Northern Parts, and the Safety of the Kingdom, Under the Conduct of his Excellence the Right Honourable Thomas Earl of Arundel and Surrey* (Newcastle: 1639). For similar regulations during the Civil War see Margaret Griffin, *Regulating Religion and Morality in the King’s Armies, 1639–1646* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 25, p. 169, p. 173.

¹⁵² Sir William Mildmay, ‘Sir William Mildmay of Moulsham’, in *Brief Memoir of the Mildmay Family*, ed. by J. Mildmay, pp. 173–185 (p. 179).

¹⁵³ Foxe relates how the Kentish martyr Alice Benden lived on ‘halfe peny bread’ whilst inured in the bishop’s prison in 1557 (Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1978). Chillenden shows how almost a century later this had doubled to ‘one penny bread a pease’ (Chillenden, *The Inhumanity*, p. 3). A ‘Penny-worth of Bread’ remained the daily portion for English prisoners right up until the end of the seventeenth century. Cf., Smith, *A collection of the several writings*, B2v.

¹⁵⁴ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1278, p. 1849, p. 1783, p. 1904.

¹⁵⁵ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), pp. 1238–1239.

¹⁵⁶ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1704.

¹⁵⁷ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1704.

¹⁵⁸ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1845.

¹⁵⁹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1981.

in the stocks with nothing but ‘bread and water’.¹⁶⁰ That same year the Protestant clergyman William Living was thrown into the Lollards’ Tower ‘all that night, no body comming to me, either with meat or drinke’.¹⁶¹

In referencing only the basic necessities of ‘bread and water’, the carceral experience of English prisoners during the seventeenth century was deliberately being depicted as not only being similar to those English men and women in ‘The Book of Martyrs’, but also to the prison pittance meted out to those scriptural prophets like Jeremiah (Jeremiah 38.9) and Micaiah (1 Kings 22.27).¹⁶² Whether generations of English prisoners were really fed only ‘bread and water’ is hard to substantiate. It is clear that such expressions were deliberate attempts by writers like St Nicholas to connect their prison experiences across time and across texts.

Makeshift Beds

Inmates often related the improvised and despised sleeping conditions within their cells. Rough sleeping in English gaols could again be contextualised using the Bible. Although, to my knowledge, no scriptural passages were consistently cited by prison authors, it was well known that many of God’s persecuted prophets and patriarchs – together with Christ and his disciples – had slept on rocks, under bushes or on the bare ground.¹⁶³ When imprisoned by Herod, the Apostle Peter is described ‘sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains’ (Acts 12.6).¹⁶⁴

It is partly in this vein that one should read St Nicholas’ description of how he tried to sleep on a ‘wainscot chest’ when detained at Sheffield on 8 May 1643.¹⁶⁵ Some of his less fortunate comrades were:

¹⁶⁰ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 2044.

¹⁶¹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 2063.

¹⁶² Spiritual sustenance despite physical malnutrition was also connected to Protestant Hagiographies see Jane Shaw, ‘Fasting Women: The Significance of Gender and Bodies in Radical Religion and Politics, 1650–1813’, in *Radicalism in British Literary Culture, 1650–1813*, ed. by Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), pp. 101–17.

¹⁶³ Jacob had to use a rock as a pillow (Genesis 28.11); Elijah slept under a bush (1 Kings 19.5); Christ on the stern of a boat (Mark 4.38); his disciples on the ground in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26.36–46).

¹⁶⁴ This was certainly the experience of George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham, who recounted in his letter to Lord Thomas Fairfax how, when he was close prisoner in the Tower in 1658, he slept ‘with a couple of guards lying always[s] in my chamber’ (Fairfax, *Correspondence*, ed. by Bell, II, p. 253). John Lilburne was one of the few to actually cite Acts 12.6. He compared his difficult sleeping conditions in the Fleet to that of Peter’s in prison. Cf., Lilburne, *Come out of her my people*, p. 32, p. 7.

¹⁶⁵ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), line 228, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 20.

Kept without beds and in cold irons laid,¹⁶⁶

Whilst under guard at Tadcaster on 25 May 1643 St Nicholas related how he and other captives:

We did desire to see if we could get
Some beds to rest on, and two things at last
Like beds we got, whereon when we were cast
Straightways an ambuscado we discovered.
A numerous brood of grey-coats there that hovered,
[...]
Made these our beds prove but a little ease.¹⁶⁷

Whereby,

After that night I lay some eight nights more
Where, though it made my bones a little sore
At first: the top of a clean parlour table.¹⁶⁸

Parliamentarian prisoners like Chillenden reported in *The Inhumanity* (1643) how detainees at Oxford Castle were ‘confined to lye... on the Tables’.¹⁶⁹ Men fighting in the King’s army complained of similar sleeping arrangements when they were captured and imprisoned. At Lincoln Castle one Chaldwell stayed in a small dungeon known as the ‘Witch Hole’, a ‘nasty stinking palace’ where he had ‘no other bed but the Ground, no other pillow but the hard stones’.¹⁷⁰ In 1646 the Leveller Richard Overton was kept in the ‘lower roome’ of Newgate, called the Lodge, where he slept ‘down upon the Bords’.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), line 222, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 19.

¹⁶⁷ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 292-296, 302, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 21.

¹⁶⁸ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 303-305, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 21.

¹⁶⁹ Chillenden, *The Inhumanity*, p. 25.

¹⁷⁰ Ryves, *Mercurius Rusticus*, 29/07-4/08/43 (Oxford: 1643), p. 74.

¹⁷¹ Richard Overton, *The commoners complaint* (London: 1647), p. 14. For further references to the haphazard nature of prison beds during the 1640s see Anon, *The cruell impieties of bloud-thirsty royalists* (London: 1646), p. 1; Wirley, *The prisoners report*, A2v; Robert Rich, Earl of Warwick, *A letter from the Earl of Warwick* (London: 1643), p. 12; Prynne, *The soveraigne power of parliaments*, p. 32; William

Similar descriptions of inmates without beds appeared in the press both before and after the internecine fighting of the 1640s. In his prison pamphlet *[T]he Miserie of a Prison, and a Prisoner* (1607) Thomas Dekker, under the persona of Cock Watt the 'walking sprit of Newgate', found some inmates lying 'on hard-beds, but the most on harder bordes, some with course and thinne couerings'.¹⁷² A debtor in the King's Bench Prison wrote in *Certaine Characters... of Prison and Prisoners* (1618) that on their first night inmates would have to use their 'cloak' with 'pots' and 'pipes' as 'the pillowe which shall be given thee to sleepe on'.¹⁷³ John Lilburne in 1639 described being placed 'in the obscurest and basest place' in the Fleet where he learnt to 'sleepe as soundly in my Boots and Irons' presumably without a bed.¹⁷⁴ The gaolers of the martyred Quaker James Parnell 'would not let him have a Trundle-Bed', but instead 'forced him to lie on the Stones'.¹⁷⁵ John Rogers wrote in *An Oyled Pillar* (1657) that at 'Sandham-fort' he was carried into a 'Dungeon lately made out of the Earth' which was 'so bad' he had 'neither beds nor straw'.¹⁷⁶ Henry Adis remarked that in the Gate-House Prison of Westminster he was 'thrust into a damp, dark dirty Dungeon, without... Bed or Bedding'.¹⁷⁷ Such instances, although clearly common, were not

Prynne, *The second part of the narrative concerning the Armies force and violence upon the Commons House* (London: 1648), p. 6.

¹⁷² Dekker, *[T]he miserie of a prison, and a prisoner*, p. 22. The lack of sleep was also seen as an opportunity for repentance. Imprisoned in the King's Bench Prison for debt, the cosmopolitan clergyman Walter Ashton preached to his fellow inmates that, 'wee should not suffer our eyes to sleepe, nor the lids thereof to slumber, untill wee have made our peace with God, by true conversion and godly sorrow, for all those sinnes, which have brought upon us this bondage and immuerement' (Walter Ashton, *The prisoners plaint a sermon preached by Gualter Ashton, Master of Arts, prisoner in the Kings Bench for debt, before the imprisoned and others in that place* (London: 1623), p. 3).

¹⁷³ G. M., *Certaine characters... of prison and prisoners*, C6r. At the turn of the century things had not got any better. The living conditions for debtors in London's Newgate were observed by one inmate as having remained as 'fulsom and nauseous' as ever, with 'their Beds and Lodgings as loathsome and wretched as any of the rest' found in other prisons (E. S., Gentleman in Prison, *A companion for debtors and prisoners* (London: 1699), p. 30).

¹⁷⁴ Lilburne, *Come out of her my people*, p. 32, p. 7.

¹⁷⁵ Parnell, *A collection of the several writings*, A2r. Similarly, the Keeper of the Newgate prison in Bristol in 1683 routinely abused Quaker inmates as they described his 'tearing and halling our Bedding' into the dirt (Anon, *A narrative of the cruelties & abuses acted by Isaac Dennis, keeper*, p. 5, also see pp. 5-9). The Quaker John Roet was said to be 'sorely abused, and denied straw to lie on' in a prison in Devonshire (Burrough, *A declaration of the present sufferings of above 140. persons of the people of God (who are now in prison,) called Quakers*, p. 2).

¹⁷⁶ Rogers, *An Oyled Pillar*, p. 21, also cf., p. 41. The Independent minister Edward Bagshaw was thrown into the Tower in 1663 where he 'had lain there three or four Days and Nights, without Candle, Fire, Bed or Straw' (Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or, Mr. Richard Baxters narrative of the most memorable passages of his life*, ed. by Matthew Sylvester (London: 1696), p. 379).

¹⁷⁷ Adis, *A fannaticks letter*, p. 6. This practise was confirmed when in 1681 the Catholic Gerard Dowdall described how he was 'forc'd to lay on the Boards [for] Twenty six weeks' before securing a bed when incarcerated in the same prison (Gerard Dowdall, *Mr. Dowdall's just and sober vindication, in opposition to several injustices practised against him, by some of his fellow prisoners in the gate-house prison of Westminster* (London: 1681), p. 10, also see p. 9, p. 12, p. 36, p. 53).

meant to be standard practice. As the contemporary prison chronicler Marmaduke Johnson observed in *Ludgate, What It Is* (1659), it was the duty of any prison's chamberlain to furnish new inmates with 'Bedding and linen' (for those who could afford it), and to regularly 'make the Beds for all the Charity men' (for those who could not).¹⁷⁸

Whether true or exaggerated, these accounts deliberately (or unconsciously) echoed the earlier prison tales of Marian martyrs. Foxe described in 'The Book of Martyrs' how Robert Glover bemoaned his cell as 'very cold with small light, and there allowed he me a bündle of straw in stead of my bed'.¹⁷⁹ In the bishop's prison Alice Benden lay on 'a litle short straw, betwene a paire of stockes & a stone wall'.¹⁸⁰ John Philpot was detained in the Lollards' Tower 'in the stockes, without eyther bed, or any other thing to lye upon' stating that there was not 'a worse and more vile place' (Figure 3).¹⁸¹ The Essex martyr Thomas Whittle was thrust into a little salt-house in 1555 where he tells us 'I had no straw nor bed, but lay two nightes on a table'.¹⁸² The Sussex martyr Robert Woodman fared no better, stating that at night he could be found 'lying on the bare ground' in the Marshalsea prison.¹⁸³ The most concerning case was of one John Davis, a 'childe under the age of 12', who was cast into the Free Man's prison in 1558. As Foxe describes, Davis found himself in an inner dungeon called the 'Peephole' where his 'lying was upon the cold ground, hauyng not one locke of strawe, nor cloth to couer him'.¹⁸⁴

In discussing their lack of beds, pillows and blankets English prisoners of the seventeenth century could express their discomforts as relatable to those of 1550s. Such scenes, then, were not meant to be unique but rather wholly comparable to those of the Marian martyrs, biblical patriarchs and Apostles.¹⁸⁵ This knowledge of the shared suffering of sleeplessness is perhaps why St Nicholas, despite having slept on a 'wainscot chest', a 'brood of grey-coats' and a 'parlour table' could still state of himself and his fellow inmates that 'we slept, we rose in peace'.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁸ Johnson, *Ludgate*, p. 36, p. 37.

¹⁷⁹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1736.

¹⁸⁰ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1981.

¹⁸¹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1829, p. 1798; also see p. 1799.

¹⁸² Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1845.

¹⁸³ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 2003.

¹⁸⁴ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 2073.

¹⁸⁵ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 413, 630, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 24, p. 28.

¹⁸⁶ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 228, 296, 305, 398, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 20-23.

Communal Prayers and Prison Piety

Captivity accounts often described the restriction or outright prohibition of communal prayer in English jails. This was to highlight both the ungodliness of prison officials and the godliness of the author's own religious steadfastness whilst incarcerated.¹⁸⁷

Imprisoned in London in 1661, Edward Delamaine reminded his fellow inmates that '*Christs Suffering hour was his praying hour*'.¹⁸⁸ Delamaine was alluding to Christ's decision to take his disciples (particularly Peter, James and John) to pray with him in the Garden of Gethsemane before he was arrested (Luke 22.39-46). Delamaine's message was clear, when praying inmates were to seek out like-minded brethren within the prison house. An equally well-known, and more pertinent, scriptural precedent for prison piety came from the actions of later biblical Apostles like Paul and Silas:

(Acts 16.25) And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.¹⁸⁹

Collective prayer within English prisons, however, does not appear to have been tolerated. When held at Tadcaster St Nicholas observed how amongst some of his fellow inmates,

to fast and pray
Was in no great request.¹⁹⁰

Even when communing with other captured Roundheads, St Nicholas describes how,

¹⁸⁷ Such representations tied into the emphasis in England on public or communal prayers over private or solitary ones during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Cf., Erica Longfellow, "'My now solitary prayers': *Eikon Basilike* and Changing Attitudes toward Religious Solitude", in *Private and Domestic Devotion*, ed. by Martin and Ryrie, pp. 53-72 (especially pp. 62-64).

¹⁸⁸ Edward Delamaine, *Sutable [sic] comforts for suffering Sion... Written by Edward Delamaine, at present under restraint, and a prisoner of hope* (London: 1661), p. 9. Also see Christopher Flower, *The penitent prisoner his character* (London: 1675), p. 3.

¹⁸⁹ For examples of this scripture being used, including by some prison writers, to support collective praying in English jails see William Attersoll, *A commentarie upon the epistle of Saint Paule to Philemon* (London: 1612), p. 468; John Barlow, *An exposition of the second epistle of the apostle Paul to Timothy* (London: 1625), p. 105; Lilburne, *Come out of her my people*, p. 7; Benjamin Hinton, *Eighteene choice and usefull sermons* (London: 1650), p. 177; Samuel Annesley, *A supplement to The Morning-exercise at Cripple-Gate* (London: 1676), p. 177, p. 183.

¹⁹⁰ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 318-319, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 21-22.

one day the marshal came
 And told us he had orders to forbid
 Our use of praying jointly, and so did;
 Said there was notice taken, said that we
 Continuing so to do must severed be.¹⁹¹

More than a month before St Nicholas completed his prison verse epistle, John Harrington described similar treatment when held for five weeks by the Royalists at Crowland, a small town in Lincolnshire. In *Divers Remarkeable Passages of Gods Good Providence* (1643) Harrington averred that ‘some insolencies we were forced now and then to endure’, which included when ‘Capt. *Styles* one day quarrelled with us for praying together, and for bad us to do so, saying, we should pray every man for himselfe’.¹⁹² Similarly, John Rogers locked in Carisbrooke Castle described how ‘we could not have *liberty to pray together*, or to have any *holy Assembly* but at the *Prison-grates*, when I put my head out at the *Iron bars* to my dear brethren and sisters in Christ, who stood in the *street*’.¹⁹³ Rogers continued to relate that fellow inmates ‘are not suffered to come at me, to *Pray* or Exercise with me’ in his chamber.¹⁹⁴ In his *A Narration of the Life of Mr. Henry Burton* (1643) Henry Burton, whilst kept at Castle Cornet on Guernsey during the late 1630s, described how he was forbidden his ‘ministry in the prison’ to preach, pray and fast with others as his ‘mouth was by Decree for ever stopped’.¹⁹⁵ Quakers in Bristol were unable ‘to Pray to God and Exhort one another, and such that come to see them’, which was compared to Foxe’s representation of the ‘Persecuted Protestant-Martyr’ Rowland Taylor who had freely engaged in communal prayers whilst locked up.¹⁹⁶ Instead, many inmates would find themselves,

¹⁹¹ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 320-324, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 22.

¹⁹² John Harrington, *Divers remarkeable passages of Gods good providence in the wonderfull preservation and deliverance of John Harrington Esqu* (London: 1643), A2r.

¹⁹³ Rogers, *An Oyled Pillar*, p. 7.

¹⁹⁴ Rogers, *An Oyled Pillar*, p. 24. In an Exeter jail in 1653 the condemned criminal William Blake also wrote that ‘in prayers and tears! how long did I pray and desire others to pray for [as much as with] me’ (William Blake, *The condemned mans reprieve, or Gods love-tokens, flowing in upon the heart of William Blake, a penitent sinner* (London: 1653), p. 3).

¹⁹⁵ Burton, *Life*, p. 37. Francis Bampfield, the Seventh Day Baptist minister, described how he was arrested in 1683 ‘whilst I was in Prayer’. When brought before the magistrates, he was sternly rebuked and swiftly imprisoned with the sentence that ‘your praying is prating’. There was a sense at his trial that Bampfield’s ‘prating’ would not be shared with other inmates in joint-prayer because the authorities deemed it seditious (Francis Bampfield, *The Lords free prisoner* (London: 1683), p. 4, p. 3).

¹⁹⁶ Anon, *A narrative of the cruelties & abuses acted by Isaac Dennis*, p. 28. Also see Anon, *Gemitus de carcere Nantes, or, Prison-sighs and supports*, p. 2.

like Humphrey Smith in 1683, being ‘put into and kept long in a Dungeon sor Praying’ for any kind of prison fellowship and company.¹⁹⁷

As the above example indicates, the hope for (rather than fulfilled) acts of collective prison piety was heavily influenced by ‘The Book of Martyrs’. Here Marian inmates were often depicted as being allowed into fellowship with one another because they were lodged in the same English prisons. When removed from the Tower to the ‘Nonnes bower’ jail, Edwin Sandys ‘ministered the Communion’ and prayed with his compatriot John Bradford, fellow inmates and even with their Keeper ‘Bowler’ who they had converted.¹⁹⁸ The Oxford martyrs Nicholas Ridley, Thomas Cranmer and Hugh Latimer were said, along with ‘other fellow Prisoners’, to be ‘most godly occupied, either with brotherly conference, or with fervent prayer, or with fruitfull writing’.¹⁹⁹ Latimer in particular was said to be so zealous in his prison prayers that ‘so long he continued kneeling, that hee was not able to rise without helpe’.²⁰⁰ Joyce Lewes the night before her execution at Lichfield in 1557, is described as ‘spending the tyme in prayer, reading, & talking with them that were purposely come unto her for to comfort her’.²⁰¹ John Hunt and Richard White in ‘a lowe and darcke Dungeon’ in Salisbury in 1558 were often found ‘kneeling there together’ for their evening prayers.²⁰² This was typical of English martyrs who were depicted engaging in nightly (and all night) praying.²⁰³ This practice was furthered inculcated into English readers by the heartfelt and public demonstration of prayers made by martyrs at the stake.²⁰⁴

In representing their willingness (but often inability) to perform communal prayers, seventeenth-century prison writers were reflecting on the successful

¹⁹⁷ Smith, *A collection of the several writings*, p. 164. Some prisoners were more fortunate. One Francis Howgil, while lying sick in prison in Appleby-in-Westmorland, Cumbria in 1688, was said to have ‘Several Persons of note... as the Mayor, and others, came to visit him; some of which praying, *That God might speak Peace to his Soul*’ (John Bolton, *A short account of the latter end and dying words of Francis Howgil, who dyed a prisoner for the testimony of Jesus, in Appulby the twentieth day of the eleaventh moneth, 1668* (London: 1671), p. 9). During his three-week imprisonment in Chester Castle in 1685 Philip Henry enjoyed the ‘good company’ of other Lancashire inmates who ‘pray’d together, and read the scriptures together’ (Matthew Henry, *An account of the life and death of Mr. Philip Henry* (London: 1698), p. 162).

¹⁹⁸ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, (1583), p. 2083; also see p. 2088.

¹⁹⁹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, (1583), p. 1740.

²⁰⁰ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, (1583), p. 1740.

²⁰¹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, (1583), p. 2013.

²⁰² Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, (1583), p. 2055.

²⁰³ Although physically exhausting, all night prayers were seen as spiritually uplifting and became a staple of Protestant piety in England. Cf., Alec Ryrie, ‘Sleeping, Walking and Dreaming in Protestant Piety’, in *Private and Domestic Devotion*, ed. by Martin and Ryrie, pp. 73-92.

²⁰⁴ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, (1583), p. 1510, p. 1543, p. 1918, p. 1940, p. 2008, p. 2013, p. 2022, p. 2036, p. 2047, *passim*.

confraternities enacted by Foxe's martyrs and even earlier biblical role-models like Paul and Silas. In so doing they, like St Nicholas, tacitly showed the historic discrepancies in the authorities' treatment of prison devotions. Whilst Marian martyrs were able to pray together, several inmates during the seventeenth century were not. At the same time prison accounts like St Nicholas' represented a historic continuity in the desire of godly inmates to maintain the practice of communal prayer whilst incarcerated.

Conclusion

My examination of prison narratives written during the seventeenth century shows how St Nicholas and other English prisoners presented their hardships as a part of a much grander historical struggle. Prison writers like him were deliberately recreating the 'harshness of prison conditions' found in the missives of the Marian martyrs. Foxe represented English martyrs writing 'from their scattered prisons to maintain their connections' and 'to establish a sense of *communitas*'.²⁰⁵ Prison narratives like St Nicholas' sought to replicate this. This literary exercise was akin to the prison graffiti made during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary I in the Tower of London. Here inmates frequently added their names to those already inscribed on their cell walls. Such acts, Ahnert argues, were deliberate because they implied 'a community (albeit temporally dispersed) and, therefore, solidarity' amongst the persecuted.²⁰⁶ Therefore, despite the fatuous dramatic rendering of those like Quicksilver in *Eastward Ho* (1605) who in prison 'can tell you, almost all the Stories of the Booke of Martyrs', inmates used the scenes within Foxe's text as a serious way of connecting past and present prison persecutions in early modern England.²⁰⁷

Scripture played a key role in this. Phrases from the Bible influenced the crucial elements in the re-presentation of English prisons and imprisonment: 1 Kings 22.27 (for a prison diet of 'bread and water'); Acts 12.6 (for sleeping without prison beds); Acts

²⁰⁵ Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom*, pp. 84-86, p. 89. More generally for the impulse of some individual saints to connect to a religious community through writing see Peter Lake, 'William Bradshaw, Antichrist and the Community of the Godly', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 36.4 (1985), pp. 570-589.

²⁰⁶ Ruth Ahnert, 'Writing in the Tower of London during the Reformation, ca. 1530-1558', *HLQ*, 72.2 (2009), pp. 168-192 (p. 178).

²⁰⁷ George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Marston, *Eastward Ho*, ed. by R. W. Van Fossen (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999), IV.2.62-4. For the complexities associated with Foxe's narration of the persecution of Protestants see A. G. Dickens, 'The Early Expansions of Protestantism in England 1520-1558', in *Reformation to Revolution: Politics and Religion in Early Modern England*, ed. by Margo Todd (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 157-178 (pp. 162-164).

16.24 (for being thrown into the most ‘innermost’ dungeons). Though these were used in ‘The Book of Martyrs’, they were also cited together in seventeenth-century sermons, pamphlets and treatise as exemplars of godly conduct during persecution.²⁰⁸ This helps to explain why the same authors – Lilburne, St Nicholas, Rogers, Parnell, Smith and Dekker – described the same kinds of prison conditions. Even if they did not cite scripture directly, their descriptions were clearly meant to be reminiscent of those prison scenes within the Bible. Their scripturalism was tied to the early Reformation tradition already noted by Lake and Questier whereby ‘accounts of stench and suffering [in prison] were clearly pictures that the early modern English reader were expected to recognise’; together with Lois Potter’s argument for the ‘centrality of prison in the lives of the reading public’ during this period.²⁰⁹ This chapter has gone some way to furthering these claims in showing the influence of the Bible together with ‘The Book of Martyrs’ when writing or reading prison narratives.

This is not to suggest that the way prisoners suffered was the same as *why* they suffered in early modern England.²¹⁰ I am not arguing that incarcerated Roundheads like St Nicholas were aligning themselves with Royalist prison writers, or that Levellers like Lilburne saw their prison conditions as comparable to those of Baptists. Prison writers did not have to share the beliefs of the writers they borrowed their imagery from. Carceral writing was as religiously factional as it was politically propagandist. Though

²⁰⁸ Cf., Richard Bernard, *A staffe of comfort to stay the weake* (London: 1616), p. 229; Samuel Whiting, *A discourse of the Last Judgement* (London: 1664), p. 137; Thomas Allestree, *A funeral handkerchief in two parts* (London: 1671), p. 98; Hercules Collins, *Counsel for the living, occasioned from the dead* (London: 1684), p. 24; John Edwards, *A discourse concerning the authority, stile, and perfection of the books of the Old and New-Testament* (London: 1693), pp. 89-91.

²⁰⁹ Lake and Questier, *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat*, p. 190; Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing*, p. 135.

²¹⁰ There is a clear contention in prison narratives between ‘testifying’ and ‘suffering’. The testimony of the true Word of God by the Marian martyrs was prioritised as more important than their suffering. Whereas to those who held a ‘Christocentric’ view, it was the actual torture and death of Christ’s disciples that was of primary importance rather than their verbal testimonies. Several early modern prison writers chose to focus on the latter, as it was here that a shared scripturalism could occur. For investigations into the conflict between ‘suffering’ and ‘testifying’ see G. W. H. Lampe, ‘Martyrdom and Inspiration’, in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, ed. by William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), pp. 118-135 (pp. 122-123). For some there was a third and more radical way. Some claimed, blasphemously, that a martyr’s ‘suffering’ and ‘testimony’ were both more important than that of Christ’. When visiting Ireland in 1669, William Penn recorded in his journal how one ‘Coll[in] Packer’ affirmed to him that ‘there were examples among the Martyrs yt suffer’d more signally, & more with joy & peace, & more gloriously, & with greater triumph then Christ did’ (William Penn, ‘Journal of Penn’s Second Visit to Ireland’, in *Pennsylvania Mag. Hist. and Biog.*, XL (1916), pp. 46-84 (p. 50)).

their bodies were confined, the beliefs of prisoners (through their mouths and pens) were not.²¹¹

Rather, prison writing offered a powerful platform and advertisement for them – encouraging a complex rhetoric of division and assimilation. Using scripture one London inmate (most likely a Quaker) wrote that:

If the Mountains, Timber, Stones, may speak, and cry (as once, *Ezek.* 7. 7. *Habac.* 2. 11 *Luke* 19. 40.) why not our Prison-walls? They that think to destroy Religious Assemblies for Prayer and Prophecy, by shutting our Doors Seizures and Confinements, may consider whether they do not by violent practices rather propagate them: and tho' they should scatter us, they do but truly multiply us; and for one Meeting of many together, cause ten and twenty perhaps an hundred) to grow out of the ruines of that one.²¹²

Such threats were made nearly a century earlier. The Presbyterian authors of the Martin Marprelate tracts argued, 'For the day that you hange Martin assure your selues there wil 20. Martins spring in my place'.²¹³

The implications here are clear. Prison accounts did not deter, but instead spurred others to commit the very same crimes – whether political or heretical – for which their authors had been imprisoned. Captivity narratives in Reformation-era England played a crucial part in 'propagat[ing]' and 'multiply[ing]' the faith of others. This meant that potential parliamentary readers of St Nicholas' prison verse may have recognised his images as commonplace and ones they had seen before. Yet those same readers would have ascribed special significance to those images which spoke to a distinct context of imprisonment by the Royalists.

²¹¹ The 'liberty of mind', which allowed for a 'protest voice' whilst incarcerated, was often espoused by English prisoners. The Earl of Lindsey, like Richard Lovelace after him, stated when incarcerated at Warwick Castle in 1643, 'the more close my body is restrained, the more enlarged and noble is my minde' (Montague Bertie, second Earl of Lindsey, *A Declaration and Justification, of the Earle of Lindsey, Now Prisoner in Warwicke-Castle* (Oxford: 1643), p. 2). For other examples, especially in prison verse, see Richard Lovelace, 'To Althea, from Prison', in *The Poems of Richard Lovelace*, ed. by C. H. Wilkinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 58; Henry Howard, 'So Cruel [A] Prison', in *Henry Howard Earl of Surrey, Poems*, ed. by Emrys Jones (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1964), p. 27; John Holles, the first Earl of Clare, British Library, 'Who is a free – by my Lord', MS Harl. 6383, fol. 68v.

²¹² Anon, *Gemitus de carcere Nantes, or, Prison-sighs and supports*, p. 10.

²¹³ Martin Marprelate, *Hay any worke for Cooper* (London: 1589), p. 20.

The activism of carceral accounts could (and did) serve general and particular aims simultaneously. In fostering shared scenarios of suffering, prison writers identified themselves as the inheritors of the Marian martyrs' writings. Yet this was only to disseminate their own political or religious agendas. Accentuating the one, did not obscure the other. As Henry Burton exclaimed, prison accounts anticipated both a broad audience in serving as outward looking exemplars of steadfastness during persecution. In discussing the rationale behind his largely Independent prison biography, *A narration of the life of Mr. Henry Burton* (1643), Burton hoped that his words 'may be able to comfort them which are in *any affliction*, by the comfort, wherewith wee our selves are comforted of God... in *all our tribulation[s]*'.²¹⁴ Readers were encouraged to view such writing as examples of the universal human struggle against oppression. If God 'despiseth not his Prisoners', Psalm. 69.33 averred, then neither should English saints the plight of Quakers, Baptists, Levellers, Independents, etc.²¹⁵ Or, as Henry Adis put in his *A Spie, Sent out of the Tower-chamber in the Fleet* (1648),

It is a general good, be then inclin'd
to have the Ruin'd Prisoner in thy mind:
For what thou dost for him, thou'lt plainly see
is for thy self, and thy posteritie.²¹⁶

Whatever their outlook, such prison writing and reading could only have developed and disseminated because early modern English jails were not the uniform State-run bastions of detention that Michel Foucault had imagined in his *Discipline and Punish* (1975).²¹⁷ In reality English prisons were privately run semi-open gaols, where

²¹⁴ Burton, *Life*, A2v, italics my emphasis.

²¹⁵ P. A., *Christian charity to poor prisoners, especially those for debt communicated in a letter by a gentleman to a poor prisoner, his friend in prison in London* (London: 1696), p. 16. Englishmen and women were to follow Christ's command to visit the imprisoned; 'I was in prison, and ye came unto me' (Matthew 25.36). Thus, all prisoners regardless of their religious, political or social leanings, deserved Christian charity – and this included the charitable reading of their works.

²¹⁶ Henry Adis, *A spie, sent out of the Tower-chamber in the fleet* (London: 1648), p. 3.

²¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans, Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 202. Here Foucault figured such institutions as the epitome of Jeremy Bentham's 'panopticon'. This was where inmates were separated, not only from the outside world but from each other, in exactly the same cells whilst under constant surveillance. In the light of recent criticism on post Reformation prisons, the Foucauldian analysis of incarceration has fallen out of favour with several early modern critics like Cambers, Corns, Dailey, and Murray. Cf., Cambers, *Godly Reading*, pp. 215-216; Thomas N. Corns, 'Literature and London', in *The Cambridge History of Early Modern*

information and publications flowed freely (as the above prison narratives attest).²¹⁸

My findings complement those of Katherine Royer who demonstrates a shift in the seventeenth century towards the English prisoner's 'voice', rather than his/her 'body' (as Foucault once theorised), as a textual object.²¹⁹ My evaluation of prison narratives, as adhering to a pre-determined and recognisable format, complements Lincoln B. Faller's thesis that spoken and printed 'gallows speeches' shaped the 'fact of actuality into patterns convenient (and useful)' to the imaginations of their listeners and readers; that each text 'was made to conform to a preexisting type'.²²⁰

This chapter has examined men like St Nicholas who tried to create a uniform mode of expression that saw ordinary prisoners' experience connected by faith and hardships. Though these writers may have had different motives, they all depended on a Protestant culture of prison writing, whose existence gave their accounts energy and authority. St Nicholas' prison representations, then, stand for a scripturalist culture that crafted a virtual community – a kind of carceral confraternity – which shared literary values. In another of his prison poems 'Upon Pontefract Castle' (1643) he demonstrates how English detainees would not lie quietly 'withdrawn from the business of the world/Enclosed/A pris'ner'.²²¹ Prisoners would write so that others would remember not just their existence, but their resistance, behind bars.

English Literature, ed. by David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 544-564 (p. 563); Alice Dailey, 'Typology and History in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*', *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism*, 25.3 (December 2002), pp. 1-29 (p. 23); Murray, 'Measured Sentences', p. 49.

²¹⁸ This was helped, in part, by the fact that prisons sometimes took the form of stately homes, churches, palaces, stables or barns, ships and even fenced 'enclosures'. For stately homes used as prisons see *The Manuscripts of his Grace the Duke of Portland*, ed. by James J. Cartwright, 10 vols (London: Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, 1891-1931), III, p. 106; Heylyn, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 22-28/09/43 (Oxford: 1643), p. 603. For churches see Samuel Seyer, *Memoirs Historical and Topographical of Bristol and It's Neighbourhood; From the Earliest Period down to the Present Time* (Bristol, 1828), p. 342; Fairfax, *Correspondence*, ed. by Bell, I, p. 234; Chillenden, *The Inhumanity*, p. 14; Heylyn, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 13-19/08/43 (Oxford: 1643), p. 449. For prisons as palaces see Rivers, *Devout Rhapsodies*, p. 34; John Walker, *An Attempt Towards Recovering An Account of the Numbers and Sufferings of the Clergy of the Church of England* (London: 1714), p. 57. For stables and barns see T. B., *Marleborowes miseries, or England turned Ireland* (London: 1643), p. 6; Whetham, *Life*, ed. by W. C. Dampier and C. D. H. Dampier, p. 65; John Barwick, *Querela Cantabrigiensis* (London: 1647), p. 8. For prison ships see William Dugdale, *The Life, Diary, and Correspondence of Sir William Dugdale*, ed. by William Hamper (London: 1827), p. 65. For 'enclosures' see Barwick, *Querela Cantabrigiensis*, p. 8; Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson, Governor of Nottingham*, ed. by J. Hutchinson, new edn, ed. by C. H. Firth, 2 vols (London: 1885), I, p. 257.

²¹⁹ Katherine Royer, 'Dead Men Talking: Truth, Texts and the Scaffold in Early Modern England', in *Penal Practice and Culture, 1500-1900: Punishing the English*, ed. by Simon Devereaux and Paul Griffiths (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 63-84 (pp. 75-78). Also see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 9, pp. 27-29.

²²⁰ Faller, *Turned to Account*, p. 2.

²²¹ Thomas St Nicholas, 'Pontefract Castle, July 1643', lines 1-2, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 14.

It seems fitting that in closing *For My Son* St Nicholas, in an act of poignant defiance, should simultaneously evoke the words of one Marian martyr and one fellow contemporary prison ‘confessor’. He concludes:

If the great God have firmly so decreed
That he²²² shall ne’er his own house see again,
Nor hear of Zion’s peace, but here remain
And live and die in this stronghold before
This war be ended, and be seen no more,
God’s will be done.²²³

Similarly, John Lilburne ended his prison letter from Oxford Castle that same year with:

If I be never ransomed, but die in my imprisonment, I shall joyfully take
my lot, and thinke I fell happy in suffering for my Religion and
Countrey.²²⁴

These, in turn, were both reminiscent of the farewell words of the Marian martyr Rowland Taylor who stated the *Pater Noster*, somewhat more succinctly, in his last prison correspondence:

I was neuer afrayd to dye: Gods will bee done.²²⁵

St Nicholas’ expectation to ‘die in this stronghold’ was never fulfilled. He was released and free to continue to serve the parliamentary cause by the summer of 1644. He went on to survive many more dangers: the 1640s with their ‘perils of the sword’, several ‘perilous falls’ from his horse, being ‘preserved from drowning’ during a

²²² For clarity, this line refers to St Nicholas.

²²³ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 592-597, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 27.

²²⁴ Lilburne, *A letter*, p. 8.

²²⁵ Foxe, *Act and Monuments* (1583), p. 1547; also cf., p. 1685, p. 1863. For the use of the *pater noster* as the very premise of prison suffering see Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), ‘Preface’, p. 15. For the Marian martyrs’ frequent use of it in their prison writings see Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1687, p. 1714, p. 1863, p. 1916, *passim*.

torrential storm, the Great Plague ‘Which millions swept away’, and even the religious persecutions of the Restoration.²²⁶ Though by the Autumn of 1667, when he contracted a terrible fever, he stoically remarked that ‘the sand within my glass/Was almost out’.²²⁷ In the next chapter we will examine his engagement with a literary culture that used the Bible as the impetus for the words and deeds enacted within the early modern sick-chamber.

²²⁶ Cf., St Nicholas, ‘Upon a Fall from an Horse’ (1648), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 43; St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn Of Praise Occasioned by... Deliverance... from... an Extraordinary Sudden Flood... 1663’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 66-70; St Nicholas, ‘Micah 6.9; The Voice of the Rod, 1665’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 104-121; St Nicholas, ‘Upon Mr Benchkin... 1664’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 99-100; St Nicholas, ‘Upon the Prison Meditation and Essays of My Dear Friend Mr Praise-God Barebone’ (1664), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 101.

²²⁷ Thomas St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery’ (1667), lines 57-58, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 152.

CHAPTER TWO

‘My sick-bed covenants’: The Biblicism of Sickness Narratives in Seventeenth-Century England

Transcript of ‘An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery out of a Dangerous Sickness in the Sixty-fifth Year of Mine Age’ (1667)

O Lord my God, heav’n is thy throne,
 The earth thy footstool is.
 Thou mad’st, and thou, yea thou alone,
 Rulest in that, and this.
 Life, breath, and all things else that be,
 By thee alone are giv’n.
 Wisely disposèd are by thee
 All things in earth and heav’n.

My times, O Lord, are in thy hand
 To make them short or longer,
 And I am at thy sole command
 To become weak or stronger.
 Thou to destruction with a word
 Canst bring the sons of men;
 And when thou pleasest, canst afford
 To say, ‘Return again!’

Lord, thou hast kept me by thy power,
 Since first I did draw breath,
 And hast preserved me to this hour
 From threat’ning jaws of death.
 ’Tis thou who, as on eagles’ wings,
 Hast carried me along
 Through perils of all hurtful things

That I have been among:

Through perils of proud waters' rage,
 Through perilous falls on shore,
 Through perils of the sword (this age
 More high than long before),
 Through plagues I never must forget
 Of 'twent' and 'sixty-five,
 Which millions swept away, and yet
 Thou sufferedst me to live.

And now when through this vale of tears
 Thy providential thread,
 As through a labyrinth of fears
 Had thy poor servant led
 Down to the bottom of my year
 Of sixty-five, when all
 The symptoms of declining were
 Concurring in the call,

Thou sent'st a summons, seemed to say,
 'Now set thine house and heart
 In order. Now thou must away.
 Old friends at length must part';
 A burning fever, which did so
 My natural moisture waste
 That friends and I thought I must go:
 Their hopes and mine were past.

O 'twas in faithfulness that thou
 Didst me this warning send,
 And didst in measure chasten now
 In order to mine end.
 Then didst thou not withdraw from me

My sense, nor yet thy grace,
 But that I could converse with thee
 In such a dying case.

Yet, when the sand within my glass
 Was almost out, and I
 And friends did think I nearest was
 In a short time to die,
 Ev'n then thy gracious hand did turn
 My half-hour glass once more,
 And mad'st my friends not so to mourn,
 In hopes thou wouldest restore,

And spare a little, and give space,
 Like a most tender father,
 That, in thy strength and by thy grace,
 I might some new strength gather
 Ere I go hence, and shall no more
 Upon this earth appear.
 And so, as often heretofore,
 Thou didst poor prayers hear,

That, after such a boist'rous storm,
 My house was kept from falling,
 That such a tread on such a worm
 Made it not quite past crawling,
 That such a leaking vessel should
 Not sink in such high seas.
 'Twas none but a great God that could
 Do such great things as these!

O what shall I return to thee
 Thou wonder-working God,
 Who hast so gracious been to me

Under this chast'ning rod?
Help me to take salvation's cup,
And make it my endeavour
When I lie down, when I rise up,
To praise thy name for ever.

O that my soul, my head, my heart,
All my remaining days,
Might, each one, act its faithful part
In giving thee due praise!
O that my life might loudly speak
My thankfulness, and I
My sick-bed covenants might not break,
Nor give my tongue the lie!

Lord, help me all my days to wait
Till my change come indeed,
Expect it every day and night,
And to my ways take heed.
My new glass running, let my scope
A perfect emblem be
Of that new state wherein I hope
Shortly to live with thee.

Amen.

This chapter will explore St Nicholas' employment of scripturalism in his 'An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery out of a Dangerous Sickness in the Sixty-fifth Year of Mine Age' (1667). Although written as a hymn of praise, it recorded his experience of illness and temporary triumph over it. This took place in the last months of his life before he died of some kind of muscular palsy.¹ St Nicholas was not entirely unique in composing a hymn that celebrated his recovery from illness.² Saints often sang hymns and psalms during and after infirmity.³ Yet it is St Nicholas' chronicling of his illness in this hymn that has much in common with the accounts of sickness by other writers.

The practice of recording ailments, and one's piety during them, was common among early modern writers in England, Scotland and Wales. This writing was enmeshed in the wider literary practice of the *ars moriendi* or 'art of dying well'.⁴ As many exegetes of the period pointed out, it was hard to know whether or not any bout of ill-health would result in a final summons to death – whether one's 'sick-bed' would become one's 'death-bed'.⁵ Thus early modern men and women were encouraged to write about not just fatal but occasional ailments. It is this body of literature that I have called 'sickness narratives', and to which St Nicholas' hymn about his 'Dangerous Sickness' will be compared.

¹ Cf., St Nicholas, 'Upon My Shaking Palsy' (1667–1668), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 163–164.

² For hymns written on the finality of (as well as the conviviality after) sickness, see Henry Wotton, 'A hymn to my God in a night of my late sickness', in Izaak Walton, *Reliquiae Wottonianae* (London: 1651), pp. 361–362; John Donne, 'Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse', in *The Poems of John Donne, Vol. 1: The Text of the Poems with Appendixes*, ed. by Herbert J. C. Grierson, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1912), I, pp. 368–369; George Wither, 'Hymn LIX. For Deliverance from Sickness', in *Halelviah, or, Britans [sic] second remembrancer* (London: 1641), pp. 95–96; Richard Baxter, 'The Covenant and Confidence of Faith', in *Poetical Fragments* (London: 1681), pp. 81–83. In an epigraph to this hymn Baxter reveals, 'This Covenant my Dear Wife in her former Sickness subscribed with a cheerful will'. Margaret Baxter had recently died, on 14 June 1681.

³ For the popularity amongst English Protestants of praising God after sickness, using the Psalms, see Benjamin Brook, *Lives of the Puritans*, 3 vols (London: 1813), II, p. 352; Robert Harris, *Hezekiahs recovery. Or, A sermon, shewing what use Hezekiah did, and all should make of their deliverance from sicknesse...* (London: 1626), p. 2, p. 15; I. C., *A Narration of the grievous visitation and dreadfull desertion of Mr. Peacock, in his last sicknesse together with the sweet and gracious issue...* (London: 1641), p. 102; Samuel Smith, *Davids repentance. Or A plain and familiar exposition of the 51 Psalm* (London: 1660), p. 323. Such a practice may have stemmed from Psalm 149.5 which encouraged, 'Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their [sick] beds'.

⁴ For an overview of this genre see Ralph Houlbrooke, 'The Puritan Death-bed, c. 1560–c.1660', in *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560–1700*, ed. by Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 122–144; Green, *Print and Protestantism*, pp. 360–368; Nancy Beaty, *The Craft of Dying: A Study in the Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England* (London: Yale UP, 1970), pp. 84–93.

⁵ Cf., William Perkins, *A salve for a sicke man* (London: 1611), pp. 82–83; Jeremy Taylor, *The rule and exercises of holy dying*, (London: 1651), A6v–B1r; Joseph Alleine, *The way to true happiness* (London: 1678), p. 68.

Any definition of ‘sickness’, then as now, has the potential to be quite broad. It could include a whole gamut of factors that were likely to cause ill-health during this period. These could be, among others: accidents, lovesickness, physical disability, old age, disease and mental illness that could lead to attempted suicide and even murder.⁶ Yet, due to the scope of this thesis, I have narrowed my search to narratives that deal with primarily virological and some physiological ailments such as fever, tooth ache, gout, measles, small pox, plague, palsy, etc. As a result, the goals and findings of this chapter are rendered more obtainable and manageable.

My exploration draws on accounts of and treatises on illness – in print and manuscript – within seventeenth-century England from clerical and lay writers. This allows me to elucidate the use of scripturalism by investigating the similar gestures, speeches, prayers and covenants (either prescribed or enacted) by those encumbered by illness. My findings reveal a shared culture of writing on sickness that drew from certain scriptures and other equally canonical texts on illness. I reveal how St Nicholas’ narrative chimes with those of others who wrote before and after him. Though he wrote his account in verse, and the recorded experience of maladies that follow below are predominantly in prose, St Nicholas’ awareness of their biblical content is striking. Here his account will be seen to align itself with others in his acts of, and attitudes towards, sick-bed devotion.

This investigation seeks to answer several key questions. What did piety in the sick-bed look and sound like? Did lay and clerical practices differ during illness? Above all, which scriptural paradigms were seen as mandatory in not only performing, but recording instances of ill-health? Ultimately, such insights provide a wider picture of the shared literary, cultural and religious values English people had when ill or near death.

⁶ For accidents that led to ill-health see Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), pp. 99-104. For lovesickness or ‘green sickness’ see Lesel Dawson, *Lovesickness and Gender in Early Modern English* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), pp. 48-89. For disabilities see Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood, eds., *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England* (Ohio: Ohio State UP, 2013), especially pp. 73-87, pp. 105-122. For old age see E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541–1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), passim. For mentally-ill murderers see J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550–1750* (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 59-101. For disease during this period see Mary J. Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), passim. For suicide see Brian Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts: Religion, Secularity, & Identity in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), pp. 236-277.

The Historiography

The writing on attitudes towards and activities during sickness in Reformation Britain has attracted considerable attention in recent years.⁷ This is part of a reinvigorated look at the rituals of death and dying during the early modern period.⁸ However, as scholars have noted, this field is by no means complete. As Walsham points out, part of the problem is archival. She demonstrates that the records of not just individual but communal protocols during illness are often hard to trace as they were ‘poorly documented’.⁹ At the height of illness, patients were not able to write down how they were feeling – so scholars have had to rely on accounts written by witnesses, or by the patients themselves only after they have recovered. This has meant, as David Harley makes clear in his essay on ‘The Theology of Affliction’, that though there have been attempts to analyse the numerous texts that describe coping with ailments in England ‘the subject has yet to receive definitive treatment’.¹⁰ Further afield, Elizabeth Tingle and Jonathan Willis state, in *Dying, Death, Burial and Commemoration in Reformation Europe*, that when it comes to studying the way people reflected as well as acted upon the dangers of mortality, ‘We are still far from possessing all the answers’.¹¹ Such gaps in our knowledge extend to the strategies employed in what people wrote and read during their ill-health. Andrew Cambers has noted in *Godly Reading* that ‘modern commentators have had little to say’ on what texts people actually consulted when sick.¹² Therefore, although comments like Patrick Geary’s that the ‘vast literature of

⁷ For recent histories on the religious experience of sickness see Hannah Newton, *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580–1720* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012); Olivia Weisser, *Ill Composed: Sickness, Gender, and Belief in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2016); Alun Withey, *Physick and the Family: Health, Medicine and Care in Wales, 1600–1750* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2011).

⁸ Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002); Ian Mortimer, *The Dying and the Doctors: The Medical Revolution in Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, Royal Historical Society: Boydell Press, 2009); Elizabeth C. Tingle and Jonathan Willis, eds., *Dying, Death, Burial and Commemoration in Reformation Europe* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015); Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts*, passim.

⁹ Alexandra Walsham, ‘In Sickness and in Health: Medicine and Inter-Confessional Relations in Post-Reformation England’, in *Living with Religious Diversity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by C. Scott Dixon, Dagmar Freist and Mark Greengrass (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 161–182 (p. 178).

¹⁰ David Harley, ‘The Theology of Affliction and the Experience of Sickness in the Godly Family, 1650–1714: The Henrys and the Newcomes’, in *Religio Medici: Medicine and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. by Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996), pp. 273–92 (p. 273). Also see Walsham, ‘In Sickness and in Health’, in *Living with Religious Diversity*, ed. by Dixon, Freist and Greengrass, p. 163.

¹¹ Elizabeth Tingle and Jonathan Willis, ‘Introduction’, in *Dying, Death, Burial and Commemoration in Reformation Europe*, ed. by Tingle and Willis, pp. 9–26 (p. 22).

¹² Cambers, *Godly Reading*, p. 68.

death and dying ignores the dead to focus exclusively on the dying' are not without merit, there still remains much work to be done on this subject.¹³

This is especially true when it comes to the influence of scripture and other canonical texts on the recording of early modern sickness. Where attempts have been made at examining the Biblicism within English autobiographical writing on illness, the focus has tended to be individualistic rather than panoramic. Several case studies illuminate the sick-bed practices of a particular family unit without fully incorporating those of others. Examples include Lucinda McCray Beier's portrait of the 'Josselins', Linda Pollock's of the 'Mildmays', Paul S. Seaver's of the 'Wallingtons', and Joanna Moody's of the 'Hobys'.¹⁴

Where scholars have broadened their scope, their examinations are limited to certain topics and themes. Several subjects have been mined to demonstrate the various but not uniform deployments of religious texts surrounding bodily disease and dysfunction. For example, the persecution of witches and cunning folk as healers, the conflict between domestic remedies and professional medicine, and a particular focus on the contested treatments for sick children as well as the dangers of childbirth and the difficulties of midwifery.¹⁵ Though useful insights into niche healers, their patients and texts, these areas of study do not provide a comprehensive view of how scripture was used by a variety of sufferers for a range, not just a selection, of infirmities and contexts.

¹³ Qtd. in Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, p. 2.

¹⁴ See Alan Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin: A Seventeenth-Century Clergyman* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970); Grace Mildmay, *With Faith and Physic: The Life of a Tudor Gentlewoman, Lady Grace Mildmay, 1552–1620*, ed. by Linda Pollock (London: Collins & Brown, 1993); Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (London: Methuen, 1985); Margaret Hoby, *The Private Life of an Elizabethan Lady: The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby, 1599–1605*, ed. by Joanna Moody (Stroud: Sutton, 1998).

¹⁵ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), pp. 209–251; Owen Davies, 'A Comparative Perspective on Scottish Cunning-Folk and Charmers', in *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, ed. by Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, and Joyce Miller (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 185–205; Elaine Leong, 'Making Medicines in the Early Modern Household', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 82.1 (2008), pp. 145–168; Mary Lindermann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), pp. 66–119; Newton, *The Sick Child in Early Modern England*, passim; Gillian Avery 'Intimations of Mortality: The Puritan and Evangelical Message to Children', in *Representations of Childhood Death*, ed. by Gillian Avery and Kimberley Reynolds (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 87–110; Ralph Houlbrooke, 'Death in Childhood: The Practice of the Good Death in James Janeway's "A Token for Children"', in *Childhood in Question: Children, Parents and the State*, ed. by Anthony Fletcher and Stephen Hussey (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999), pp. 37–56.

Those who have attempted a more comprehensive approach have fared little better – in establishing a paradigm of scripture-based behaviour during illness. One such study is that of Ralph Houlbrooke who, in his essay on ‘The Puritan Death-bed, c. 1560-c.1660’, suggests that although the ‘prominence of death-beds’ was a common theme in conduct books and biographies, there was ‘no one dominant way of dying’ amongst Bible-readers.¹⁶ David Cressy provides an important cultural overview of dying in *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*.¹⁷ Yet his investigations do not cover the shared Bible writings and readings recorded by the sick. The historian who has come closest to exploring the role of scripture reading during sickness is Andrew Cambers in his *Godly Reading*, but he does not identify precisely what passages were consistently read, or explore the reasons why the sick kept returning to them.¹⁸ Such variegated approaches to early modern illness are epitomised by Tingle and Willis, who have argued that religious belief at the sick-bed was, ‘where abstract ideas, new doctrines, old habits and almost-forgotten shreds of half-belief crystallised into a messy and imperfect expression of individual identity’.¹⁹ As a result such scholarly work paints the scriptural attitudes towards sickness and dying in England with a somewhat ambivalent brush.

Gradually scholars have come to appreciate that more work needs to be done. Some important – if incomplete – strides have been made. Andrew Wear promises a useful starting point in his essay entitled ‘Puritan Perceptions of Illness in Seventeenth-Century England’. Wear initially states that sickness was a ‘learnt procedure’ which required ‘ritualised behaviour learnt for the occasion’. His research, however, discovers the reverse in that there were a ‘plurality of models of illness’ and that the vocabulary used to express it ‘varied greatly’.²⁰ In *The Craft of Dying* Nancy Lee Beaty does examine the printed manuals on dying and their theological import by a variety of religious authors across the period. Nonetheless, she does not look at the practical

¹⁶ Houlbrooke, ‘The Puritan Death-bed’, in *The Culture of English Puritanism*, ed. by Durston and Eales, p. 122, p. 144; also see Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480–1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 160–182.

¹⁷ David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), pp. 379–395.

¹⁸ Cf., Cambers, *Godly Reading*, pp. 63–71.

¹⁹ Tingle and Willis, ‘Introduction’, in *Dying, Death, Burial and Commemoration in Reformation Europe*, ed. by Tingle and Willis, p. 14.

²⁰ Andrew Wear, ‘Puritan Perceptions of Illness in Seventeenth-Century England’, in *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society*, ed. by Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), pp. 55–100 (pp. 64–65, p. 84).

application of such works, including scripture, in accounts of physical affliction.²¹ Consequently, scholars have struggled to find a coherent paradigm of scripturally prescribed piety that English men and women maintained in their writing about sickness during the Long Reformation.

This chapter attempts to address these issues in several ways. For the scope of this study, I have chosen to cast a wide net. I have selected primary sources that discuss the infirm from a variety of social backgrounds (aristocratic, ministerial, lay, and poor). In doing so a genuine picture emerges of the scriptural behaviours during sickness that were shared by diverse social groups.²² I have also chosen to be non-gender specific in selecting accounts that were written for and about the ill. I examine accounts about husbands, fathers, sons, wives, mothers and daughters. My findings somewhat complicate the scholarship that argues that there were different approaches to gender during illness in the early modern period.²³

Such an expansive view continues in my choice of extra-scriptural texts and their prescriptions on how to act during infirmity. My chapter draws on the theological work of denominationally disparate divines. This is because it is hard to believe that popular works on dying well by Established Church bishops such as Jeremy Taylor and Lancelot Andrewes were simply ignored by Quakers, Baptists, Independents and other dissenters because of the faith of their authors.²⁴ This is why I also use texts on sickness which were just as popular, (but during the early rather than the later Stuart period), produced by such low-churchmen as William Perkins and Thomas Becon.²⁵ I do so with the view that there is no way of knowing for sure whether they were not read by later Laudian and Arminian sufferers too.²⁶ Where connections between canonical

²¹ Nancy Lee Beaty, *The Craft of Dying: A Study in the Literary Tradition of the Ars moriendi in England* (London: Yale UP, 1970).

²² Social diversity was present in every religious group during this period. Cf., John Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603–1689* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 187–188.

²³ Cf., Margaret Pelling, *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England* (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 179–258; Patricia Crawford and Sara Heller Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England: 1550–1720* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), pp. 194–199; Mary E. Fissell, ‘Introduction: Women, Health, and Healing in Early Modern Europe’, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 82.1 (Spring 2008), pp. 1–17.

²⁴ Green, *Print and Protestantism*, pp. 364–365.

²⁵ Green, *Print and Protestantism*, pp. 361–362.

²⁶ The broad appeal of such works to English Protestant is best exemplified in Richard Baxter’s *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650). It was read by as varied a crowd as Henry Newcome, Elizabeth Annesley, John Elliot and John Rastrick. Cf., respectively, Newcome, *Autobiography*, ed. by Parkinson, I, p. 135; John Dunton, *The life and errors of John Dunton, citizen of London; with the lives and characters of more than a thousand contemporary divines, and other persons of literary eminence*, 2 vols (London: 1818), I, p. 276; Alison Searle, ‘“Though I am a Stranger to You by Face, Yet in Neere Bonds by Faith”: A Transatlantic Puritan Republic of Letters’, *Early American Literature*, 43.2 (2008), pp. 277–

texts and recorded acts of piety are found, they are simply used as representative rather than definitive examples of the kind of scripturalism employed within the sick-chamber.²⁷

This chapter also takes the rare approach of including accounts of recovery and survival in its exploration of sickness. Most historians to date focus on illness and death. Hannah Newton's new book, *Misery to Mirth: Recovery from Illness in Early Modern England*, is the only other scholarly work that I am aware of to explore this important area.²⁸ Thus, my chapter provides a more balanced picture of health in early modern England.

By addressing these issues, this chapter seeks to provide a much-needed analysis of the shared Biblicism performed at the sick-bed in England during the seventeenth century. Its findings will also prove a useful bridge between investigations on the use of 'recordi' (family remembrances) during maladies in the Middle Ages and the 'patient narratives' of the eighteenth century.²⁹

The Cultural Context

The mediums and motives for writing about maladies during this period were as multifarious as they were intersectional. Sickness narratives were composed, read, circulated or printed in funeral sermons, diaries, newsbooks, theological tracts, court

308 (p. 284); Andrew Cambers and Michelle Wolfe, 'Reading, Family Religion, and Evangelical Identity in Late Stuart England', *The Historical Journal*, 47.4 (December 2004), pp. 875-896 (p. 893).

²⁷ This point is worth labouring as counter-Reformation texts on dying well, though corrected and censored, were just as easily circulated amongst Protestant flocks as the originals were amongst Catholic cells. Richard Baxter at the age of fifteen records how he found his father's copy of *A Book of Christian Exercise* (1584) written by the priest Robert Parsons and revised by Edmund Bunny who was chaplain at the time to Edwin Sandys archbishop of York. This text contained instructions on the *ars moriendi*. Upon reading it, Baxter describes the remarkable effect it had upon him whereby 'it pleased God to awaken my Soul' by it (Beaty, *Craft*, p. 158). If Baxter could read such a text written by a Catholic, revised by an Episcopalian, and find it instructive as a moderate (and future) dissenter, then why not others too? Thus, it is myopic to believe that some faiths only read the works prescribed by their co-religionist and disregarded widely read texts on dying well solely on the premise of doctrinal difference.

²⁸ Hannah Newton, *Misery to Mirth: Recovery from Illness in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018). I am extremely grateful to Hannah Newton for allowing me to read draft sections of this book before it was published. I am also indebted to her helpful comments on this chapter.

²⁹ For the use of medieval 'recordi' see Carole Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies: Communal Health in Late Medieval English Towns and Cities* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 101-122; Malcolm Richardson, *Middle Class Writing in Late Medieval London* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), p. 156, p. 170. For 'patient narratives' see Jonathan Barry, 'Piety and the Patient: Medicine and Religion in Eighteenth Century Bristol', in *Patients and Practitioners*, ed. by Porter, pp. 145-176; Philip Rieder, 'Patients and Words: A Lay Medical Culture?', in *Framing and Imagining Disease in Cultural History*, ed. by George Rousseau and others (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 215-230.

records, martyrologies and other prosopographical works.³⁰ Firstly, such accounts chronicled the personal ailments of an author for historical or religious posterity.³¹ Secondly, they were vital to those who were absent from or ignorant of the ills that plagued their loved ones.³² This showed that early modern people did not rely merely on rumour and report (as we are so often told) but might receive written or personal verbal accounts of sickness, death or recovery by first hand observers.

Thirdly, accounts of sickness were often not just circulated amongst families, but to the local communities in which they lived. Indeed, infirmity was a communal affair. This is reflected in early modern reading practices for such accounts, not to mention the popularity of the weekly Bills of Mortality.³³ Fourthly, sickness narratives, especially those written about others, served to illustrate the Christian duty of visiting the afflicted. This applied to pastor and parishioner, though both struggled to fulfil this duty.³⁴ Fifthly, the impetus to chronicle sickness was part of a desire to record possible cures for it. This was often the prerogative of nobly-born gentlewomen.³⁵ Finally, sickness narratives were composed to demonstrate the practical outworking of a corpus of work that had dealt with theological instructions on dying well – known as the *ars*

³⁰ Cf., George Downname, *A funerall sermon preached at Watton in Hertfordshire, at the buriall of the ancient and worthy knight, Sir Philip Boteler, Decemb. 9. 1606* (London: 1607), pp. 69-71; George Hughes, *The Art of Embalming Dead Saints* (London: 1642), pp. 46-50; Samuel Clarke, *The lives of two and twenty English divines* (London: 1660), pp. 64-65 p. 83-84, pp. 90-91, pp. 140-142, passim; Samuel Clarke, *A collection of the lives of ten eminent divines* (London: 1662), pp. 16-17, pp. 48-51, pp. 81-84, pp. 122-124, pp. 150-156, passim.

³¹ Cf., Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*, p. 201; John Donne, *Letters to severall persons of honour* (London: 1651), p. 32, p. 42, p. 57, p. 71, p. 103, p. 180, p. 203, p. 249; Ralph Josselin, *The Diary of Ralph Josselin, 1616–1683*, ed. by Alan Macfarlane (London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1976), p. 163, p. 157, p. 173, p. 165, p. 200, p. 169, p. 196, p. 157, passim.

³² Arthur Clifford, ed., *Tixall Letters: or, the Correspondence of the Aston family and their friends during the seventeenth century. With notes and illustrations by A. Clifford* (1815), p. 131; Simonds D'Ewes, *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Sir Simonds D'Ewes*, ed. by James Orchard Halliwell, 2 vols (London: 1845), II, pp. 276-278; also see I, p. 42; II, p. 7; Alexander Brodie, *The Diary of Alexander Brodie*, ed. by David Laing (Wisconsin: Brookhaven Press, 1982), p. 473.

³³ D'Ewes, *Autobiography*, ed. by Halliwell, I, p. 260; Nehemiah Wallington, *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618–1654: A Selection*, ed. by David Booy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 328; Henry Jessey, *The exceeding riches of grace advanced by the spirit of grace, in an empty nothing creature, viz. Mrs. Sarah Wight* (London: 1647), B4v.

³⁴ See respectively: Josselin, *Diary*, ed. by Macfarlane, p. 167, p. 168, p. 174, p. 190, p. 204, p. 206; Newcome, *Autobiography*, ed. by Parkinson, I, p. 73; Hanserd Knollys, *The life and death of that old disciple of Jesus Christ and eminent minister of the Gospel Mr. Hanserd Knollys who dyed in the ninety third year of his age written with his own hand to the year 1672*, ed. by William Kiffin (London: 1692), p. 5.

³⁵ For the nursing of family, friends and servants by gentlewomen see Mildmay, *With Faith and Physic*, ed. by Pollock, p. 108; Hoby, *Diary*, ed. by Moody, p. 24, pp. 35-37, p. 65; Anne Clifford, *The Diary of Anne Clifford, 1616–1619: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Katherine O. Acheson (New York; London: Garland, 1995), pp. 127-132, p. 154.

moriendi.³⁶ These manuals demonstrated not so much a radical departure from the Catholic tradition which had started them, as a gradual refining of sick-bed behaviours that were more in line with the new ecclesiastical landscape of the Reformation.³⁷ This meant that throughout the seventeenth century, deathbed literature was a staple of the chapbook trade.³⁸

Whatever their motives, the authors and subjects of sickness narratives had to demonstrate knowledge of the scriptures. Statements such as Edmund Calamy's were typical of the period that, 'The Word of God is the *sick Saints salve*, the *dying Saints cordial*; a most precious medicine to keep Gods people from perishing in time of affliction'.³⁹ Calamy, in his popular treatise *The Godly Mans Ark* (1657), asked his readers to 'make a Catalogue' of heavenly promises from the scriptures in order to 'study them in time of health, that you may enjoy the benefit of them in the time of sickness'.⁴⁰ Samuel Clarke in *Medulla Theologiae* (1659) advised saints to have 'a stock of Scripture-Promises which will be as so many reviving cordials, and spiritual Anchors to uphold us from perishing in the day of distresse'.⁴¹ In *Christ's Power over Bodily Diseases* (1662) the Presbyterian Edward Lawrence – a dissenter who ministered to a separatist congregation in Whitchurch, Shropshire – similarly advised, as a preparation for infirmity, having a 'Scripture right to God' and being able to recall all the 'blessings and promises' of deliverance and sustenance that lay within the Holy Book.⁴²

³⁶ First established in the Middle Ages this was a series of texts that codified the acts, words and sentiments to be performed on the Catholic deathbed. These texts became immensely popular and enjoyed numerous editions during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The theological import of such works, together with their popularity, caused a reinvigorated analysis of how to suffer and die well from a slew of prominent Calvinist writers from the Reformation onwards. For an overview of this medieval tradition, see Beaty, *The craft of dying*, pp. 1-53.

³⁷ For the origins of the Reformation's departure from the Catholic *Ars Moriendi*, see Austra Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The Ars Moriendi in the German Reformation (1519–1528)* (Missouri: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 143-189. Although there were some differences in the approaches Catholic and Protestant theologians took to the forms of deathbed piety, some have begun to consider the subtle similarities that underpinned them. Andrew Wear argues that there are 'similarities between Protestants and Catholics in their approach to illness not only at the general level but also in detail' (Andrew Wear, 'Religious Beliefs and Medicine', in *The Task of Healing: Medicine, Religion, and Gender in England and the Netherlands, 1450–1800*, ed. by Hilary Marland and Margaret Pelling (Rotterdam: Erasmus, 1996), pp. 147-155 (p. 148)).

³⁸ Cf., Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), pp. 195-218; Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), pp. 278-288; Green, *Print and Protestantism*, pp. 410-420.

³⁹ Edmund Calamy, *The godly mans ark or, City of refuge, in the day of his distresse* (London: 1657), p. 94.

⁴⁰ Calamy, *The godly mans ark*, C4r, p. 38. This work had eight editions between 1657-82.

⁴¹ Samuel Clarke, *Medulla theologiae* (London: 1659), p. 46.

⁴² Edward Lawrence, *Christs power over bodily diseases* (London: 1662), p. 198.

There were a variety of ways that English denizens could do this. They could write out their own list of scriptural promises.⁴³ Failing this, the sick could always, as one pamphlet entitled *An Ease for a Diseased Man* (1625) instructed, be ‘occupied in reading of the Word: for there he shall finde, examples of Gods mercy shewed upon the afflicted’.⁴⁴ Saints were also encouraged to be constantly attending sermons as a way of remembering scripture for use in their time of trouble.⁴⁵ People could also have the Word read to them whilst in their sick-beds if they were not able to do so themselves.⁴⁶ Whichever way they chose to approach it, the use of scripture was imperative during sickness. This was never more apparent than in the narratives authors wrote during their own or others’ ailments. St Nicholas’ hymn on his recovery from illness was no different in this regard.

Sick-Bed Speaking and Gestures

The sick-bed was not just a place for reading scripture, but showing that one actively understood its precepts and believed in them. The infirm were not to suffer in silence. Instead their words and actions were to reflect their Biblicism. The recording of their experience of illness within manuscript and printed accounts was to be a testament (spoken as well as written). In order to achieve this, the necessity to speak was paramount. The ability (or inability) to do so was often highlighted in several accounts of the sick.

In his ‘An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery’ (1667) St Nicholas thanks God that:

⁴³ The Norwich minister and later dissenter John Collinges, when preaching the funeral sermon for Mary Simpson, spoke of how she had kept a ‘sheet written close, containing severall promises, which she by her diligent reading had gathered up to sute her soule in the time of need’ during her sickness (John Collinges, *Faith & experience; or, A short narration of the holy life and death of Mary Simpson, late of Gregories Parish in the city of Norwich* (London: 1649), p. 82). Calamy told of one Mrs Moore who did ‘gather together my Scripture Evidences’ as assurances of her eternal salvation during her final illness (Calamy, *The godly mans ark*, p. 235).

⁴⁴ M. M., *An ease for a diseased man* (London: 1625), p. 12.

⁴⁵ As Abraham Man argued, ‘For faith [during infirmity] is both wrought and also increased by hearing of the word’ (Abraham Man, *An amulet or preservative against sicknes and death* (London: 1617), p. 18).

⁴⁶ Cf., Henry Walker, *An account of the last houres of the late renowned Oliver Lord Protector* (London: 1659), p. 10; Hutchinson, *Memoirs*, ed. by Firth, II, p. 344; Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 566. When John Evelyn’s five-year-old son, Richard, was confined to bed after suffering several ‘fits of a quartan ague’ in 1658, ‘He would of himself select the most pathetic psalms, and chapters out of Job, to read to his maid during his sickness, telling her, when she pitied him, that all God’s children must suffer affliction’ (John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. by Austin Dobson, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), II, p. 128).

Then didst thou not withdraw from me
 My sense, nor yet thy grace,
 But that I could converse with thee
 In such a dying case.⁴⁷

It is clear from his account of the friends who visited him during his malady (which are discussed below) that St Nicholas was not just grateful for being able to talk with God but with all those around him during his fever. Like him, some were grateful for their ability to still communicate whilst otherwise encumbered. In 1667 observers recorded how Nathaniel Heywood, a dissenting Presbyterian who ministered to saints in Ormskirk, Lancashire, was ‘strong in his intellect all the time of his illness’ before he died.⁴⁸ Another Lancashire dissenter, John Angier – whose son-in-law Oliver Heywood was the older brother of Nathaniel – gave thanks that during his final sickness in 1677: ‘What a mercy it is! my understanding is as good as ever in all my life’.⁴⁹ One bystander agreed that Angier understood all quite well, except seemingly the discomforts of his present ailments.⁵⁰ Mary Penington, who was married to the Quaker writer Isaac Penington, also praised God in 1680 that He ‘makes my bed in my sickness, and withholds my eyes from sleeping, [in order] to converse’ with Him and others.⁵¹ In the autumn of 1690 the radical nonconformist preacher Samuel Jeake, despite his ‘dying symptoms’ was still observed to have ‘his sense continuing till the last’.⁵² ‘Sense’ here is taken to mean a combination of Jeake’s inner senses (rationality, understanding and memory) and his outer five senses – especially his ability to hear and speak.⁵³

However, more often than not, sufferers were not so lucky or so coherent. When the widow Hope Winter lay afflicted in bed in 1625 her friend Elizabeth Stockden recalled in court how, ‘she could not speak over three words at a time and could not

⁴⁷ St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery’ (1667), lines 53-56, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 152, italics my emphasis.

⁴⁸ Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 499.

⁴⁹ Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 566.

⁵⁰ Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 566.

⁵¹ Mary Penington, *Some Account of Circumstances in the Life of Mary Penington from her Manuscript, left for her Family* (London: 1821), p. 59.

⁵² Samuel Jeake, *An Astrological Diary of the Seventeenth Century Samuel Jeake of Rye, 1652–1699*, ed. by Michael Hunter and Annabel Gregory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 203.

⁵³ Cf., 5.b., ‘Sense, n.’, and 12.a., ‘Sense, n.’, *OED*, online edn, 2017.

understand anything'.⁵⁴ In 1658 Adam Martindale, a Presbyterian minister known to Angier and other Lancashire saints, reported that when his father fell ill from a raging fever it caused him to become nonsensical and delirious. Martindale relays how he would 'rave and ramble strangely, to the great griefe of his poore wife and children'.⁵⁵ Philip Henry, the ejected clergyman who ministered at Broad Oak and Bronington, Flintshire, recalled a similar instance whilst visiting the sickly daughter of a local clerk on 29 August 1661. He observed of the child, whose name was Margaret, that he 'pray'd for her & by her, but shee hardly understood mee through extremity'.⁵⁶ In *Looking-Glass for Children* (1673) the author, one 'H. P.', described how a ten year old Mary Warren was so ill from an abscess in her stomach that she lay 'speechless for many dayes' and was not able to eat.⁵⁷ The London dissenting clergyman James Janeway said much the same in his funeral sermon for the apothecary Thomas Mowsley, which was later printed as *Death Unstung* (1669). Janeway describes how when he visited the dying Mowsley he lay 'speechless for many hours' in the July of 1669. Slipping in and out of consciousness, when Mowsley did eventually speak he was found to be 'betraying some weakness in his intellectuals'.⁵⁸

Although there is no obvious biblical mandate for such behaviour (though Psalm 130.1: 'Out of the depths of misery, have I cald', has some resonance) the sheer number of examples shows how vital speech was seen to be during illness. Some sufferers went to extraordinary lengths to demonstrate their scripturalism by speaking when ill. Such was the case in the account of the Independent Welsh minister Vavasor Powell.

⁵⁴ Qtd. in Elizabeth A. Hallam, 'Turning the Hourglass: Gender Relations at the Deathbed in Early Modern Canterbury', *Mortality*, 1.1 (March 1996), pp. 61-82 (p. 72). Hallam's central argument is that whilst women predominantly acted as visitors and caretakers of the sick, men were solely employed in the writing, reading, and sealing activities of will-making.

⁵⁵ Martindale, *Life*, ed. by Parkinson, p. 4. The Scottish Presbyterian Robert Blair described one gentlewoman that became so sick from an unknown illness that she spoke gibberish by her 'long speaking and [yet] empty brain' (Robert Blair, *The Life of Mr Robert Blair ... containing his Autobiography*, ed. by Thomas M'Crie, Wodrow Society, 11 (1848), p. 106). In much the same vein Elizabeth Nimmo recounted of her ailing husband James Nimmo in 1709 that his 'bodily sickness was so great that he was not in case to speak much'. This was confirmed by their daughter Alexander who concurred that her father 'spake not much in his sickness' (Nimmo, *Narrative of Mr James Nimmo*, pp. xxii-xxiii).

⁵⁶ Philip Henry, *Diaries and letters of Philip Henry, M.A. of Broad Oak, Flintshire, A.D. 1631-1696*, ed. by Matthew Henry (London: 1882), p. 94.

⁵⁷ H. P., *A Looking-glass for children being a narrative of God's gracious dealings with some little children* (London: 1673), p. 11.

⁵⁸ James Janeway, *Death unstung a sermon preached at the funeral of Thomas Mowsley, an apothecary, who died July, 1669: with a brief narrative of his life and death* (London: 1669), p. 86, p. 85. Similarly, Richard Heywood, when he became ill from fever in 1677 – a serious bout that would eventually get the better of him – was reported as 'his strength was much abated, and that his memory failed him, repeating often the same things' (Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 585).

Incarcerated and dying in the Fleet Prison in the summer of 1669, Powell's physician insisted that he should be 'kept from speaking much'. Yet so zealously was he affected for the glory of God 'that neither his pains, bodily weakness, tender advice of friends, could possibly restrain him' as he broke forth into 'high and heavenly praises, sometimes by prayer, [and] sometimes by singing'.⁵⁹ Even when talking was detrimental to his recovery, Powell saw the necessity and importance of being able to communicate during infirmity in order to leave a godly example behind him. So crucial was it to him that we are told that in 'his sickness, he begged [sic] of God that he would please to continue his understanding', which the Almighty summarily did.⁶⁰ So too was the case with the Presbyterian minister Simeon Ashe who, in the autumn of 1662, lay bed ridden from gout that had turned feverish. Baxter reports that though Ashe had 'lain speechless for some time', yet as soon as 'I came to him, gladness so excited his Spirits, that he spake joyfully and freely'.⁶¹ After a complicated delivery, Lady Danby was 'exceedingly tormented with paines', 'yett still did she spend her time in discourse of goodnesse excellently pious, godly, and religious, instructing her children and servants'.⁶² These expressions were a way of modelling out faith and perseverance during illness for others to follow. They were also a way of reassuring family members of a sick person's own faith that they would be in heaven should they die. Yet, if anything, these accounts emphasized the obligation (though obvious health risk) of speaking during sickness in order to demonstrate an understanding of scripture.⁶³

⁵⁹ Edward Bagshaw, *The life and death of Mr Vavasor Powell* (London: 1671), p. 190. When Thomas Tregross lay dying of old age in 18 January 1671, 'his physician desired him to desist, lest he should spend his spirits too much'; upon which replied, 'Give me leave to speak, for I am upon the borders of eternity, and I think you all look upon me as a dying man: you may therefore suffer me to speak as much as I can' (Edmund Calamy, *Nonconformists Memorial*, ed. by Samuel Palmer, 3 vols (1802-3), I, p. 366). In 1620 Sir Simonds D'Ewes described his younger sister Cecilia, 'It is scarce credible what signs of grace she expressed at so young years; having the Sunday before she died [of small pox] repeated a great part of the sermon she heard to a merchant with whose wife she had gone to school [in Walbrook London]' (D'Ewes, *Autobiography*, ed. by Halliwell, I, p. 157). On her deathbed Mrs Joan Drake 'continued still speaking both night and day to some one or other who watched with her, yet all of the best things; for her time being short, she imagined (as she said) she could not too advantageously improve the same' (John Hart, *The firebrand taken out of the fire, or, The wonderfull history, case, and cure of Mis Drake, sometimes the wife of Francis Drake of Esher in the county of Surrey, Esq* (London: 1654), p. 136).

⁶⁰ Bagshaw, *The life and death of Mr Vavasor Powell*, p. 195.

⁶¹ Baxter, *Reliquiae*, ed. by Sylvester, pp. 430-431.

⁶² Qtd. in Andrea Brady, 'The Gift of Mourning: Death in the Early Modern Household', in *Emotions in the Household, 1200-1900*, ed. by Susan Broomhall (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 185-202 (p. 195).

⁶³ There were those who defied this rule. When a sixty-one-year-old William Archer, lecturer at Colchester, lay dying in August 1670 his son Isaac recorded how, 'He declared nothing on his death bed, as not in the least looking to die; and he used to be silent in sickness, and to say "Let the life shew what the man is"' (Isaac Archer, 'The Diary of Isaac Archer, 1641-1700', in *Two East Anglian Diaries 1641-*

Even the inability to speak was sometimes overcome by sufferers. Here some tried to respond in physical rather than verbal gestures. Increase Mather wrote of his father, the Massachusetts minister Richard Mather, that he did not ‘speak much in his last Sickness either to Friends or to his Children’ in 1669. Instead Richard attempted to express meaning whereby he ‘lifted up his hands’ as an affirmative to catechistical questions put to him.⁶⁴ Mather subsequently published this account as part of *The Life and Death of that Reverend Man of God, Mr. Richard Mather* (1670). When suffering from ‘palsy’ we have already seen how Hope Winter in 1625 ‘made little or noe answer by word’ when the scriptures were being read to her. However, as one minister attending to her observed – when he was called to testify to her competency in a dispute over her will – ‘by her jesture [of] her *hand* or her *countenance* she manifested her devotion and good understanding of what was then read’.⁶⁵ As the Cornish Quaker Richard Samble said of his fellow believer Christopher Bacon as he lay on his deathbed in 1678, ‘he could not speak many Words more’ but ‘lifting up his Hands, whereby Friends understood that his Life was fresh and green in the everlasting Love of God’.⁶⁶ The same gestures were performed by the mother of Alice Thornton, the Lady Alice Wandesford. In 1659, Wandesford, though ‘her speech failed’ her, ‘still she could lift up her hands to God’. One of Lady Wandesford’s other daughters Dafeny prayed ‘that she would give them some sign that she found comfort of God’s spirit in her soul with a taste of the joys of heaven’, which she ‘immediately did’ and ‘lift[ed] up both hands unto heaven three times’.⁶⁷ This gesticulation – of raising hands in an act of prayer or praise – was so engrained in early modern England that even sick children were aware

1729, ed. by Matthew Storey (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1994), pp. 41-200 (p. 122)). Isaac Archer noted, however, that his father’s words were in fact a paraphrase of Matthew 7.20, ‘Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them’ (p. 122).

⁶⁴ Increase Mather, *The life and death of that Reverend Man of God, Mr. Richard Mather, teacher of the church in Dorchester in New-England* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1670), pp. 27-28. Interestingly, the raising of hands was often the appropriate expression of piety and sought-after redemption at the scaffold. Cf., Anon, *The cruel mother; being a true relation of the bloody murther committed by M[ary]. Cook... with the manner of her execution and demeanour there* (London: 1670), p. 8; N. Partridge, *Blood for blood, or, Justice executed for innocent blood-shed* (London: 1670), p. 47; Anon, *The confession and execution of the prisoners at Tyburn* (London: 1676), p. 8.

⁶⁵ Qtd. in Hallam, ‘Turning the hourglass’, p. 75, italics my emphasis. For an Elizabethan example of this by one Richard Potto see Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 2010.

⁶⁶ Richard Samble, *Richard Samble’s testimony concerning Christopher Bacon, who deceased the 29th day of the 10th month 1678. Written at Falmouth in the county of Cornwall* (London: 1678), p. 4.

⁶⁷ Thornton, ‘A Book of Remembrances’, in *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Graham and others, p. 153. The night before he died on 3 October 1690 Samuel Jeake told his son, ‘I go to my Father’ whilst ‘lifting up his hand’ (Jeake, *Diary*, ed. by Hunter and Gregory, p. 208). Such behaviour was mocked during the Civil War by some newsbooks. Cf., Heylyn, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 24-30/12/43 (Oxford: 1643), p. 749.

of it. A five-year-old Richard Evelyn on his deathbed is recorded as having requested, due to the ‘agony’ of his ague, ‘whether he might pray to God with his hands unjoined’, which his father permitted so that Richard could ‘keep his hands in [the] bed’.⁶⁸

The importance placed on verbal and physical signs during sickness was explained by the Middlesex devotional writer John Norden in *A Pathway to Patience* (1626). In a section entitled ‘Comfort for the Sick’ Norden reminded his readers that ‘for the satisfaction of such as visite a sicke person, if he [the sufferer] can but shoue it [their piety] by the tongue in speaking, though weakely’. If unable to do so, Norden recommended the ‘lifting up [of] his hands, or eyes’ because this would ‘argue the inward heart wel prepared’ for heaven.⁶⁹ As a result, it was imperative that accounts recorded the speech of the sick.⁷⁰ Such insights help us understand why those like St Nicholas praised God for keeping his ‘sense’ intact so that he could ‘converse’ with those around him. Whether by sign or word such accounts were intended to be a comprehensive record of their authors’ scriptural attitude and posture towards suffering as an imitation for others to follow.

Sick-Bed Covenants and Prayers

Another way the infirm could point to scripture was by making a covenant. As Hannah Newton points out, in the early part of the Reformation ‘the tradition of covenant-making was rejected by Protestants on the grounds that sin was unavoidable, and to promise to abstain meant placing undue faith in one’s own willpower’.⁷¹ By the late sixteenth century, however, the practice was creeping back, and, as Alec Ryrie demonstrates, by the 1630s it was ‘almost within the pale of Protestant acceptability’.⁷²

⁶⁸ Evelyn, *Diary*, ed. by Dobson, II, p. 129.

⁶⁹ John Norden, *A pathway to patience in all manner of crosses, tryals, troubles, and afflictions: inwardly for sinne, or outwardly by sicknesse* (London: 1626), pp. 86-87.

⁷⁰ Only Charles I’s stutter during his death (as in his life) could be glossed over in an elegy as a divine virtue rather than a debilitating deficit:

Twere all as inarticulate, and weak,
As when those men make signes, that cannot speak.
But where the Theme confounds us, ’tis a sort
Of glorious merit, proudly to fall short.

(Anon, *Monumentum Regale, or a Tombe Erected for that Incomparable and Glorious Monarch, Charles the First... in select Elegies, Epitaphs and Poems* (London: 1649), p. 21).

⁷¹ Newton, *Misery to Mirth*, p. 139.

⁷² Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, pp. 132-133, p. 139.

Unsurprisingly, in several accounts the godly bargained with the Almighty for their health by way of making reformatory vows. St Nicholas pleaded with his Maker that he

My sick-bed covenants might not break,
Nor give my tongue the lie!⁷³

He was not alone. The dissenting minister and autobiographer Oliver Heywood made similar expressions when he suffered from a fierce fever for three weeks in 1647. He recounted in his diary how, ‘when in sickness thou didst solemnly vow to God, that if he would restore thee thou wouldst serve him at the altar all the days of thy life’.⁷⁴ As Philip Henry recorded in 1657, when a gentlewoman lusted after a man she aimed to make her husband, yet ‘shortly after, being sick, shee makes a Vow, never to entertayne such thoughts any more’.⁷⁵ A nineteen-year-old Gervase Disney, a silk merchant apprenticed in London, recalled how when he had a fit of sickness in 1661 he became ‘full of Purposes, and Promises too, that (if the Lord pleased to spare me) I would (through Grace) mind Religion as my Business, and follow the Lord fully’.⁷⁶ Similarly Alexander Jaffray, a member of the Long Parliament and later a Quaker leader, made such a ‘vow’ to God when his body was afflicted by illness. On 22 March 1658 he prayed to the Almighty that if his ‘health and strength be prolonged, then my desire and promise was, in his strength to be more forthcoming for his service’.⁷⁷ Some made vows not just for themselves, but as a proxy for sick family members. In 1645 Mary Rich, countess of Warwick, when her son fell drastically ill, ‘begged of Him to restore

⁷³ St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery’ (1667), lines 95-96, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 153.

⁷⁴ Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 412, also cf., p. 14. On the 19 April 1614 Richard Kilby during his suffering with a severe bout of kidney stones decided to write out a covenant and ‘bind my selfe unto God’. This consisted of three principal rules: to be always repentant, seeking grace, and prayerful. Kilby promised that these would enable him ‘to order my selfe’ in better spiritual reformation if he recovered (Richard Kilby, *Hallelu-iah: praise yee the Lord, for the unburthening of a loaden conscience By his grace is Jesus Christ vouchsafed unto the worst sinner of all the whole world* (London: 1618), p. 48).

⁷⁵ Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 33.

⁷⁶ Gervase Disney, *Some remarkable passages in the holy life and death of Gervase Disney* (London: 1692), p. 36. God kept his side of this sick-bed covenant in that within two days Disney was ‘perfectly recovered’, and it appears Disney made heartfelt attempts at reformation.

⁷⁷ Jaffray, *Diary*, ed. by Barclay, p. 113.

my child; and did then solemnly promise to God, if He would hear my prayer, I would become a new creature'.⁷⁸

Sick-bed covenants, however, were ill-advisedly made as they were hard to keep and hardly kept. After making his, Jaffray asked if God would help him perform such a promise 'better for the time to come, than I have done in times that are gone by'.⁷⁹ This indicated that he had broken such sick-bed covenants before. The religious radical and diarist Anne Venn had similar apprehensions when she fell sick with fever in 1650. She noted in her daily meditations that she could not 'promise the Lord any amendment of life, as I had formerly done in all my other sicknesses' because 'I could never make good any of these promises, vowes, or covenants, by me so made' during illness.⁸⁰ The cautionary sentiments of lay sufferers like Jaffray and Venn were not unfounded, as English ministers were equally sceptical of such oaths. As Whiting had pointed out, '*Make good your sick-bed thoughts, and purposes... what you then purposed, now practise: [for] sick people usually have the best minds, but the worst memories*'. Whiting added, 'sad experience hath let us see too often, that words are but winde, and all the sick-bed resolutions vanish into air'.⁸¹ Baxter had also warned that, 'Sick bed Promises are usually soon forgotten'; and John Beadle that 'How many are there that on their sick dayes make new promises, but being recovered, forget God'.⁸² This trend of making and breaking sick-bed covenants led Jeremiah Burroughs to admonish

⁷⁸ Mary Rich, *Autobiography of Mary, Countess of Warwick*, ed. by Thomas Crofton Croker (London: 1848), p. 19. A somewhat similar bargain was struck by Lady Anne Harcourt when her son Philip fell 'very sike of a feavour' on 27 June 1649. She noted in her diary how the morning after she had prayed for him, 'God spared his life, it beeing not begged absolutely, but only with this condition, as it might be for G[od]s glory' (A. Harcourt, 'Diary', in *The Harcourt Papers*, ed. by E. Harcourt, I, p. 172). When Alice Thornton contracted smallpox in Ireland in 1642, Frank Kelly, a boy her household had taken in who was also ill with the disease, is described by Thornton as 'when he heard I was in danger of death, desired with teares that God would be pleased to spaire my life, & to blesse me, yt I might live to doe much good to others, as to him, & yt he might rather be taken away & I spaired' (Alice Thornton, British Library, 'Deliverances', MS. Add. 88897/1, 73).

⁷⁹ Jaffray, *Diary*, ed. by Barclay, p. 113. Alice Thornton wrote to her son Robert, when he was suffering with a fever in May 1692, that he may have 'grace to keepe all your vowes and promises to God of reformation' (Alice Thornton, *The Autobiography of Mrs. Alice Thornton, of East Newton, Co. York*, ed. by Charles Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1873), p. 310).

⁸⁰ Anne Venn, *A wise virgins lamp burning* (London: 1658), p. 29.

⁸¹ Nathaneel Whiting, *The art of divine improvement* (London: 1662), p. 82. Lewis Bayly may very well have been referring to this trend of covenanting during infirmity when he said: 'Their vowes shew the desires of their spirituall man' and yet 'their breakings [of it], the weakenesse of their corrupt flesh' (Lewis Bayly, *Practise of Pietie* (3rd edn., London: 1613), p. 900).

⁸² Baxter, *Reliquiae*, ed. by Sylvester, p. 90; John Beadle, *The journal or diary of a thankful Christian* (London: 1656), p. 2. Also see Francis Taylor, *The danger of vowes neglected and the necessitie of reformation* (London: 1646), p. 24. Similarly, in 1666 Thomas Willis declared, in a thanksgiving prayer to be said by those delivered from the Great Plague, 'Help me to perform all my Vows and Promises' made when afflicted by the disease (Thomas Willis, *A help for the poor who are visited with the plague: to be communicated to them by the rich* (London: 1666), p. 56).

Parliament in his sermon later printed as *Sion's Joy* (1641). Burroughs was emphatic that 'many of you upon your sick beds have sometimes made vows to God to do him service if ever he restored you', to which he added ominously, 'God lookes to have them fulfilled'.⁸³

These admonitions may make St Nicholas' 'sick-bed covenant' appear somewhat cowardly in the making or futile in the keeping – that valetudinarians only used such oaths to buy them more time, and once they became well simply forgot them. However, as the Scottish Presbyterian minister Zacharie Boyd had argued in *The Balme of Gilead Prepared for the Sicke* (1629), 'it is lawfull for a man, beeing in danger of death to begge his lyfe from his GOD'.⁸⁴ Such vows were sincerely made precisely because they were dearly bought. For the sick were all too aware of their susceptibility to breaking these promises to God and, like St Nicholas, were anxious about giving 'my tongue the lie'. Therefore, those who made sick-bed vows understood and feared the consequences of doing so. This is as there were several scriptures, particularly within the Old Testament, which served as glaring reminders of the agonising fate that awaited those who broke such covenants with the Lord.⁸⁵

Despite their ubiquity, one may ask how such oaths were scriptural. Could these sick-bed covenants have been inspired by a particular scripture and spoken as prayers? St Nicholas' hymn is illuminating in its colloquy taken from Psalm 39.13. Where in the Authorized Version this passage read:

O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.

St Nicholas paraphrases it as:

spare a little, and give space,
Like a most tender father,
That, in thy strength and by thy grace,

⁸³ Jeremiah Burroughs, *Sions joy* (London: 1641), p. 63. Cornelius Burges preached more strongly of the sick, 'what would not they promise, on condition to be delivered from their present anguish, and feares! But once deliver them, and God shall heare no more of them, till they be in the same, or worse case again' (Cornelius Burges, *Two sermons preached* (London: 1642), pp. 40-41).

⁸⁴ Zacharie Boyd, *The balme of Gilead prepared for the sicke* (Edinburgh: 1629), p. 97.

⁸⁵ Cf., Genesis 7.14; Leviticus 26.14-18; Deuteronomy 17.2-5; Joshua 7.15; 1 Kings 11.11.

I might some new strength gather
 Ere I go hence, and shall no more
 Upon this earth appear.⁸⁶

His use of this scripture was as poignant as it was pertinent. The psalm's plangent plea was attributed to King David during a dire illness or moment of intense distress. It is no coincidence that Psalm 39.13 was often recommended as one to be prayed during infirmity in printed works by episcopal and dissenting divines. The Elizabethan luminary William Perkins taught that it should to be prayed at the sick-bed as he argued King David had once done.⁸⁷ This was in Perkins' immensely popular treatise *A Salve for a Sicke Man*, which was first published in 1595 and reached eleven editions by 1638. Psalm 39.13 was what Thomas Willis, vicar of Kingston upon Thames and chaplain to Charles II, had advised praying for 'one that is visited with the Plague' in his *A Help for the Poor* (1666).⁸⁸ The Independent minister Jeremiah Burroughs preached that 'If any people in the world should desire the continuance of their lives, and prize them at a high rate... they should pray *Davids prayer, Psalm. 39. 13*'.⁸⁹

Lancelot Andrewes, the bishop of Winchester, quoted this scripture as part of his 'Meditations for the Sick' within his *Holy Devotions* (1663).⁹⁰ The New England minister John Cotton told saints to pray this passage if a 'man by sicknesse may lose his strength and vigour' in his *A Practicall Commentary* (1658).⁹¹ Jeremy Taylor, the Church of Ireland bishop, used Psalm 39.13 as a prayer of thanksgiving to be said after sickness had passed. Entitled 'An act of holy resolution of amendment of life in case of recovery', Taylor's prayer contained the words: 'O spare me a little that I may recover my strength before I go hence and be no more seen'.⁹² This was printed in Taylor's

⁸⁶ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery' (1667), lines 65-70, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 152. The Scottish Covenanter James Brodie made a similar request. After experiencing 'great dimnes in my sight, and giddines in my head', he implored the Almighty in his diary to 'spare me, and give grace to use evrie gift and facultie, member and sence, for God, and His honour, and glorie' (Brodie, *Diary*, ed. by Laing, p. 481).

⁸⁷ Perkins, *A salve for a sicke man*, p. 99. Psalm 30.2 was also a suitable prayer during sickness. It stated, 'I cried unto thee, and thou has healed me'. This scripture was used by the Baptist prophetess Katherine Sutton as a testament to her healing. Cf., Rachel Adcock, *Baptist Women's Writings in Revolutionary Culture, 1640-1680* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 91-92.

⁸⁸ Willis, *A help for the poor who are visited with the plague*, p. 39.

⁸⁹ Jeremiah Burroughs, *The saints treasury being sundry sermons preached in London* (London: 1654), p. 126.

⁹⁰ Lancelot Andrewes, *Holy devotions, with directions to pray* (London: 1663), p. 473.

⁹¹ John Cotton, *A practicall commentary, or an exposition with observations, reasons, and uses upon the first Epistle generall of John* (London: 1658), p. 403.

⁹² Taylor, *Holy Dying*, p. 215.

bestselling spiritual treatise *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* (1651) which was printed nineteen times between 1651 and 1700.

St Nicholas was clearly familiar with these printed works on coping with illness. In following their theological advice, his sick-bed covenant was said as a prayer based on Psalm 39.13. It was God's answer to his sick-bed covenant, that he was referring to when he thanked the Almighty that,

so, as often heretofore,
Thou didst poor prayers hear.⁹³

St Nicholas was not the only one to use this scriptural passage as a sick-bed covenant and prayer. The Northamptonshire gentlewoman Elizabeth Isham did exactly the same when she fell ill with 'one [of the] greatest colds since I can remember', which she feared was actually a sign of having contracted the 'pestilence' it being 'so neare us as a mile'.⁹⁴ In her manuscript diary, entitled 'Booke of Remembrance', Isham records calling out to God, 'if it be thy will spare me, that I may recover my strength: psal [3]9.1[3] before I go hence and be no more seene'.⁹⁵ On his death-bed, Andrew Rivet, a French physician, asked his family to make a sick-bed covenant on his behalf using Psalm 39.13. This was in hopes of receiving a divine recovery before he succumbed to his illness. He implored his niece to 'Call upon th[y] Comforter to return, and rene[w] that excellent work which h[e] had advanced in me. O Return! Return! Confirm me wit[h] thy strength, before I go hence, and be seen no more'.⁹⁶ Even the 1662 edition of the BCP seemed to endorse the effectiveness of such scriptural covenants. Under 'The Order for the Visitation of the Sick' the minister was to cry out to God on behalf of the sick using the prayer of Psalm 39.19: 'O Lord... strengthen *him*, wee beseech thee... before *he* go hence, and be no more seen'.⁹⁷ Therefore, it is highly plausible that the

⁹³ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery' (1667), line 72, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 152.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Isham, 'Booke of Remembrance', in *Constructing Elizabeth Isham Project*, ed. by Alice Eardley (University of Warwick, 2009) <<http://web.warwick.ac.uk/english/perdita/Isham>> [accessed 13 March 2016], 7v. This edition is based on the original Princeton manuscript which can be found under: Elizabeth Isham, Princeton, Firestone Library, 'Booke of Remembrance', MS RTC01, no. 62.

⁹⁵ Isham, 'Booke of Remembrance', in *Constructing Elizabeth Isham*, ed. by Eardley, 8r.

⁹⁶ Nehemiah Coxe, *A believers triumph over death exemplified in a relation of the last hours of Dr. Andrew Rivet* (London: 1682), p. 72.

⁹⁷ Church of England, 'The Book of Common Prayer, 1662', in *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. by Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), pp. 183-666 (p. 448). The text further reinforced the effectiveness of this prayer by stating, 'O Lord, that there is no word

sick-bed covenants made by other authors during this period were inspired by such scriptural passages and that their oaths were said as prayers.

Put another way, the act of praying was a form of covenanting during infirmity. Several manuscript accounts of sickness reflect this. In 1630 Robert Blair felt ‘stirred up to more frequent prayer’ in order to be set free from a ‘sad sickness’.⁹⁸ Oliver Cromwell was said to have prayed on his deathbed in 1658: ‘Lord, Thou knowest, if I do desire to live, it is to shew forth Thy praise and declare Thy works’.⁹⁹ Philip Henry often prayed for deliverance from a variety of illnesses that assailed him.¹⁰⁰ The biographer of Oliver Heywood observed that through every ‘affliction he had used the language of prayer’ for healing.¹⁰¹ Similarly the biographer of John Angier stated that ‘as he had been a man of prayer all his days, so he died praying’ for physical deliverance.¹⁰² When Nathaniel Heywood lay dying in 1677 he told his wife, ‘Let us pray and wait on God, he never failed us yet, come let us trust him’.¹⁰³ Such sentiments were also shared by the ninety-six-year-old Donald Munro, who – when overcome by a strange rheumatism on Sunday, having attended his local Church in Kiltarn, Scotland punctually every Sabbath – prayed in his sick-chamber in 1699: ‘Lord, be pleased to hear this prayer’ said for his recovery.¹⁰⁴

In these narratives, one sees how essential prayer was in providing spiritual succour to ailing English and Scottish men and women. Their accounts demonstrate the

impossible with thee... thou canst even yet raise *him* up, and grant *him* a longer continuance amongst us’ (p. 448).

⁹⁸ Blair, *Autobiography*, ed. by M’Crie, p. 127. In 1601, a fellow compatriot, the Scottish minister James Melville, prayed that although: ‘My seiknes, with the manifold schowres of the vexationnes of mynd, continowed yeir and day’, yet God who ‘uphalds and confortes the contreit and humble, did uphold and comfort me, to whom, therefor, be everlasting praise – Amen’ (James Melville, *The Autobiography and Diary of Mr. James Melvill... with a Continuation of the Diary*, ed. by Robert Pitcairn (Edinburgh: 1842), p. 489).

⁹⁹ Oliver Cromwell, *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. by T. Carlyle and S. C. Lomas, 3 vols (1904), I, p. 249. For those who disagreed with the effectiveness of prayer during sickness, as opposed to after it, by the sufferer or by those around them, see Willis, *A help for the poor who are visited with the plague*, A4v, pp. 39-44; Lancelot Langhorne, *Mary sitting at Christs feet: A sermon preached at the funerall of Mrs Mary Swaine* (London: 1611), p. 28.

¹⁰⁰ On 1 February 1658 he fell into a ‘violent fit’ and ‘Godly Friends being present, I prayed with them; lord, hear in heaven’. He called out during a belligerent cold on 24-25 September 1661, ‘lord, sanctify every twig of thy rod, and let all th. work together for my spiritual & eternal advantage’. During a fierce fever, on 2-3 November 1663, he uttered, ‘lord my times are in thy hand & I am glad in my heart’ (Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 42, p. 96, p. 150).

¹⁰¹ Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 31.

¹⁰² Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 554.

¹⁰³ Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 490.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas M’Crie, ed., *Memoirs of Mrs. William Veitch, Mr. Thomas Hog of Kiltarn, Mr. Henry Erskine and Mr. John Carstairs* (London: 1825), p. 97.

shared belief in prayers during sickness as covenants (and sick-bed covenants as prayers) as valid calls for release from suffering.

Patience during Illness

Yet even if such ‘covenants’ did not cause a remarkable return to health, sickness narratives were always careful to emphasize the sufferers’ patient posture in their utmost faith in, and resignation to, the divine will of God. Here the ill did not complain or rail against their illness and the pain or inconvenience it was causing them. Instead many had to demonstrate the key scriptural attribute of ‘patience’.¹⁰⁵

St Nicholas’ did this by placating the Almighty:

Help me to take salvation’s cup,
And make it my endeavour
When I lie down, when I rise up,
To praise thy name for ever.¹⁰⁶

This was taken from Psalm 116.13:

I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.

This verse was connected specifically to enacting ‘patience’ during affliction in Reformed English doctrine. Decades earlier, under the subheading of ‘Concerning the Patience and Thankfulness required in the sick’ in his *A Manual of Directions for the Sick* (1648), Lancelot Andrewes quoted Psalm 116.13: ‘I will take this cup of salvation, and give thanks to the Name of the Lord’.¹⁰⁷ William Cowper, the Church of Scotland bishop of Galloway, had used this scriptural verse in his *Three Heaueonly Treatises* (1609) to explain that during times of affliction ‘let us cleave to his promise, and waite

¹⁰⁵ Godly sufferers were ‘patient’ in both senses of the word. They were to demonstrate the quality of ‘enduring pain... without discontent or complaint (l.a., ‘Patient, n.’, *OED*, online edn, 2016); and be a ‘patient’ ‘undergoing the action of another’ (2^d. a., ‘Patient, n.’, *OED*, online edn, 2016), that is as a passive recipient of God’s correction for sin through sickness.

¹⁰⁶ St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery’ (1667), lines 85-88, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 153.

¹⁰⁷ Lancelot Andrewes, *A manual of directions for the sick* (London: 1648), p. 24.

on the vision' of God's deliverance for 'though it tarry, let us wait for it'.¹⁰⁸ William Perkins stated that instead of demonstrating 'impatience and griefe' saints should consider Psalm 116.13 which taught patience in that, 'all things in sicknes & death come to passe unto us by the prouidence of god, who turnes all things to the good of them that love him'.¹⁰⁹

More generally throughout the seventeenth century, treatises expressed the need for the biblically attested virtue of patience during affliction. A pamphlet entitled *An Ease for a Diseased Man* (1625) had advised readers to demonstrate 'Patience and constancy in his trouble'.¹¹⁰ The Northamptonshire clergyman Nathaneel Whiting in his *The Art of Divine Improvement* (1662) warned those in suffering that 'will not wait the Lords time, but discover Impaciency, if helps come not at their own time'.¹¹¹ Such calls were reinforced in the 1559 and 1662 editions of the BCP's 'Order for the Visitation of the Sick'. Here ministers were to exhort their sick parishioners to suffer 'patiently' no less than five times. These exhortations ended with the minister reading Psalm 71 whose 14th verse rang, 'As for me, I will *patiently* abide, always[s]'.¹¹² This emphasis on suffering 'patiently' can be traced back to the medieval *ars moriendi* which had labelled 'impatience' as one of the five grievous temptations of the deathbed.¹¹³

Due to its ubiquitous usage in sickness manuals, expressions of 'patience' became synonymous with adherence to Psalm 116.13. Unsurprisingly, St Nicholas was not the only one to remark on this scriptural quality during infirmity. When the Essex minister and diarist Ralph Josselin lost his eight year old daughter Mary in the summer of 1650, he stated that she 'was patient in the sicknesse, thankefull to admiracon'.¹¹⁴ Lucy Hutchinson, the Republican and religious Independent, wrote of her husband that

¹⁰⁸ William Cowper, *Three heauenly treatises* (London: 1609), p. 324.

¹⁰⁹ Perkins, *A salve for a sicke man*, p. 116.

¹¹⁰ M. M., *An ease for a diseased man*, p. 12.

¹¹¹ Whiting, *The art of divine improvement*, p. 266.

¹¹² Church of England, 'The Book of Common Prayer, 1559', in *The Book of Common Prayer*, ed. by Cummings, pp. 99-182 (pp. 164-168); Church of England, 'The Book of Common Prayer, 1662', in *The Book of Common Prayer*, ed. by Cummings, pp. 442-446.

¹¹³ Houlbrooke, 'The Puritan Death-bed', in *The Culture of English Puritanism*, ed. by Durston and Eales, pp. 130-131.

¹¹⁴ Josselin, *Diary*, ed. by Macfarlane, p. 74. Though 'under a long and mortal sickness', Sarah, the nineteen year old daughter of John Stockton, was described as 'expressing a most christian Patience and Submission, to the Will of God' (John Fairfax, *Presvyteros diples times axios, or, The true dignity of St. Paul's elder exemplified in the life of ... Mr. Owen Stockton ... with a collection of his observations, experiences and evidences recorded by his own hand: to which is added his funeral sermon* (London: 1681), p. 55. For further examples, see Mather, *The life and death of... Mr. Richard Mather*, p. 28.

‘he was very patient under sickness or pain, or any common accidents’.¹¹⁵ Edmund Calamy, the minister of St Mary Aldermanbury, London, argued in his funeral sermon for Simeon Ashe in 1662 that from the ‘great afflictions by reason of the Gout’ Ashe was seen to possess ‘a great measure of patience’.¹¹⁶ In 1663 the Scottish Covenanter Walter Pringle described how one of his sisters, in what had been a year of ‘sickness and extreme pain’, had ‘endured [it] most patiently’ to the ‘admiration of all about her’.¹¹⁷ The Particular Baptist Hanserd Knollys described that before his son Isaac had succumbed to a dangerous illness on 15 November 1671 he ‘exercised very great patience under his very great pain, soreness, and burning Feaver’.¹¹⁸ In June 1680 Mary Penington stated that, ‘So I had nothing to do in sickness, but to suffer patiently’.¹¹⁹ These expressions of ‘patience’ were important because they acutely demonstrated that the sick trusted God.

There were notable exceptions. Elizabeth Wallington, mother of the wood-turner and diarist Nehemiah Wallington, was remembered as screaming on her deathbed, ‘No more, Lord, no more; no more, Lord, no more!’. She continued by questioning the cause of her suffering, ‘Lord, what have I done, what is my sin... that thou dealest thus with me?’.¹²⁰ Nehemiah took such cries of impertinence and impatience as a warning. His mother’s outbursts, however, were neither popular nor prevalent amongst the sick. Those who committed them were strongly rebuked by ministers or family members. One example can be found in Richard Baxter’s ‘A

¹¹⁵ Hutchinson, *Memoirs*, ed. by Firth, I, p. 34. The universalist and ejected minister John Horne, when he preached the funeral sermon of one Thomas Slany in 1649, declared that he was ‘patient under affliction (though long in great pain)’ (John Horne, *The life of faith in death, in expectation of the resurrection from the dead opened in a sermon at the funerall of the right worshipfull Mr. Thomas Slany late maior of the famous town and corporation of King-Lynn in the county of Norfolk* (London: 1649), p. 30).

¹¹⁶ Edmund Calamy, *The righteous mans death lamented. A sermon preached at St. Austins, London, Aug. 23. 1662* (London: 1662), pp. 19-20. In 1689 it was said of the dissenting minister Edmund Trench, after having become sick from an infected scratch he had received from falling off his horse, that ‘under all the excessive Tortures of his Pain, and frequent lancements of the Chirurgeons, he still exprest great Patience’ (Edmund Trench, *Some remarkable passages in the holy life and death of the late Reverend Mr. Edmund Trench most of them drawn out of his own diary* (London: 1693), p. 107).

¹¹⁷ Walter Pringle, ‘The Memoirs of Walter Pringle of Greenhow; or Some Few of the Free Mercies of God to Him, and His Will to His Children, Left to Them Under His Own Hand’, in *Select Biographies*, ed. by Reverend W. K. Tweedie, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Wodrow Society, 1847), I, pp. 411-494 (p. 452).

¹¹⁸ Knollys, *The life and death of... Hanserd Knollys*, ed. by Kiffin, p. 39. William Kiffin related Knollys’ attitude to his own final suffering in similar terms, ‘All the time of his Sickness he behaved himself with extraordinary Patience, and Resignation to the Divine Will’ (Knollys, *The life and death of... Hanserd Knollys*, ed. by Kiffin, p. 43).

¹¹⁹ Penington, *Life of Mary Penington*, p. 56. Similarly, in January 1680 the wife of Oliver Heywood, Abigail, fell under a violent sickness that lasted a month in which she demonstrated ‘patience and free submission to the Lord’s pleasure’ (Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 234).

¹²⁰ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, p. 27.

Dialogue between the Flesh & the Spirit', printed as part of his *Poetical Fragments* (1681). When the 'Flesh' complained 'Who can... under pining sickness be content?', the 'Spirit' replied dryly, 'He... That waits for Glory when his life is done'.¹²¹ This did not mean that the sick were not allowed to express their suffering – through groans, cries and screams of pain.¹²² What theologians objected to was a rebellious attitude towards suffering – where the sick felt angry with God for causing their pains, or felt they didn't deserve it.

By using Psalm 116.13, those like St Nicholas were able to join the chorus of other scripturalist authors who had written of how they and their loved ones had endured the suffering and affliction of sickness *patiently*.¹²³

Visiting the Sick

All of the above demonstrations of scriptural acts and attitudes during illness – patience, speaking and gesturing, prayers and covenants – were performed in front of an audience. The sick-bed was not necessarily a lonely place.¹²⁴ The sick-chamber often

¹²¹ Richard Baxter, 'A Dialogue between the Flesh & the Spirit', in *Poetical Fragments*, pp. 65-74 (pp. 66-67). Lay saints also chastised themselves after making expressions of impatience during infirmity. Lady Anne Harcourt wrote in her diary in January 1658 how the 'Lord was pleased to visit me with an ague, I had but 3 fitts, but they were soe terrible to me, that in the last I exprest great impaytience; which afterwards, upon con-sideration, did soe trouble me, as that the fear of beeing in the like maner distempred, did make me aprehend the coming of another fitt, with such dread, as did ade to my affliction'. Harcourt also realised that signs of impatience were causes for greater afflictions from the Lord. She notes how 'this fayling on my part, [was] enough to have provoked the Lord to have layed his hand more heavily upon me' (A. Harcourt, 'Diary', in *The Harcourt Papers*, ed. by E. Harcourt, I, p. 182). Mary Rich was very distressed by her husband's failure to endure his debilitating gout patiently. She describes Charles Rich as 'not beareing his paines with that submission to Godes will as I thought he ought to doe' (qtd. in David Thorley, *Writing Illness and Identity in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 103).

¹²² As Taylor argued, in his section on 'Impatience', the sick man 'cries so loud to God, that it pierces the clouds; and so hath every sorrow, and every sicknesse: and when a man cries out, and complains but according to the sorrowes of his pain, it cannot be any part of a culpable impatience, but an argument for pity' (Taylor, *Holy Dying*, p. 83).

¹²³ This chimes with the representation of Providence in other literary genres. Lake and Questier argue that in murder pamphlets, 'human beings are shown to be mere playthings of the divine will. The room for creative human agency left in these narratives, either for the murderers or for their pursuers, is very limited indeed' (Lake and Questier, *Lewd Hat*, pp. 39-40).

¹²⁴ Though this greatly depended on geography and community. Isaac Archer noted in his diary that, when he moved from Chippenham, Cambridgeshire to Whelnetham in Suffolk in 1671, though he had 'tried my neighbours... I think it is an uncomfortable, helples, and desolate place to be sick in' (Archer, 'Diary', in *Two East Anglian Diaries*, ed. by Storey, p. 141). When he moved to Freckenham in Suffolk a year later, to be nearer to his relations, he noted the difference this had made to tending to his ill wife. After his wife suffered from a summer 'dropsie', nearby family members came to tend to her ensuring that she 'now recovered almost'. 'Had I lived at Wheltham', Archer remarked, 'she might have died for want of looking to' (Archer, 'Diary', in *Two East Anglian Diaries*, ed. by Storey, p. 147). For a fuller discussion of the 'isolation to integration' of the sick, see Newton, *Misery to Mirth*, pp. 193-230.

served as a type of thoroughfare for family, neighbours, visitors, healers and ministers.¹²⁵ This was because visiting the sick was a scriptural duty. English Protestants had to attend to the sick as one of the seven acts of corporeal mercy that Christ spoke of:

(Matthew 25.35-37) for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

This injunction had appeared in medieval texts and was retained in the *ars moriendi* works written after the Reformation.¹²⁶

Visiting to the sick was for entirely practical as well as spiritual reasons. Ministering to the ill, as mandated by both scripture and the BCP, was seen by some clergymen as just one of a plethora of pastoral duties that were not only hard to fulfil, but were ones they were unwholly prepared for.¹²⁷ Philip Henry was so shaken by his experience with one ill parishioner that he plangently confessed in his diary: 'I know not how to deal with persons in sick-ness, lord help mee'.¹²⁸ Moreover, as Martindale explained, during the 1650s ministers had 'worke enough to doe' with 'Preaching twice every Lord's-day', 'besides expounding, catechising, and all other publick worke, together with visitation of the sick' and 'preaching at many funeralls'.¹²⁹ The need for

¹²⁵ However sometimes different parties collided. Visiting ministers often noted the strong disapproval of physicians who felt their presence a hindrance rather than a help to the treatment of their patients. Cf., William Perkins, *A golden chaine* (5th edn., Cambridge: 1600), p. 502; Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 566; Baxter, *Reliquiae*, ed. by Sylvester, p. 178; Wear, 'Puritan Perceptions of Illness', p. 70.

¹²⁶ Man, *An amulet... against sicknes and death*, p. 264; Taylor, *Holy Dying*, p. 120, p. 166; Perkins, *A salve for a sicke man*, pp.103-104; M. M., *An ease for a diseased man*, p. 5.

¹²⁷ English divines frequently visited the sick, praying with sufferers to provide them with comfort and edification. For examples see Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, pp. 248-249, p. 265, p. 300, p. 336, p. 375, p. 471, p. 566, passim; Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 41, p. 45, p. 74, p. 98, p. 119, passim; Knollys, *The life and death of... Hanserd Knollys*, ed. by Kiffin, p. 24, p. 31; Newcome, *Autobiography*, ed. by Parkinson, I, p. 53, p. 64, p. 136, p. 147, passim. Visiting the sick was not peculiar to dissenting ministers. Conforming clergymen were mandated to visit the sick by the Church of England's BCP. Cf., George Herbert, *A priest to the temple, or, The country parson his character* (London: 1652), pp. 66-68.

¹²⁸ Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 94. Similarly, when his son John passed away on 24 March 1667 from measles, he lamented in his diary how the 'sickness quickly took away the use of his understanding' (Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 205). Yet when Henry was on his own deathbed, he had no such trouble. His biographer noted how, 'His Understanding and Speech continued almost to the last Breath' (Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 379).

¹²⁹ Martindale, *Life*, ed. by Parkinson, p. 104. Some clergymen were remiss in their duty to visit the sick. Thomas Shepard confessed as much in the notes he made to his manuscript copy of his autobiography. He repented that though 'the people being committed to me' during his time as a clergyman in Earls

visiting the sick greatly increased during times of plague and pestilence.¹³⁰ During a sickly season in Manchester in 1657 the Cheshire dissenter Henry Newcome reported in his diary how he found, 'It was somewhat new to me to visit so many of the sick... I visited three or four sick persons a day, and several burials in a week'.¹³¹

These duties were exhausting. Clergymen became depressed by or desensitised to the plight of the ill. Hanserd Knollys recorded how he was so busy with this duty that he would save time by working on a funeral sermon while sitting at the bedside of the unconscious but not yet deceased saint.¹³² To English ministers, the helpfulness of visiting family, neighbours and friends could be an invaluable resource in providing for the needs of the sick. Physically, visitors could fetch medicines and apply prescribed or homemade remedies.¹³³ Spiritually, visitors gave spiritual consolation by reading the Bible to the infirm in their bedchamber.¹³⁴ This is why several spiritual manuals urged the laity to visit the sick and dying in their communities.¹³⁵ Some towns even incentivised palliative care by offering to pay those who looked after ill relatives.¹³⁶

Yet visitors were not just replacements for clerical counsel, or palliative carers for the sick. They were also recorders of a sick person's attitude toward scripture. On the one hand, the sick were often too ill to start or finish recording accounts of their behaviour during illness; as we have already seen, some could hardly speak, let alone write. In such cases their narratives were written, transcribed and later edited by close

Colne from 1627–1630, he had 'not pitied so much... nor prayed for... nor visited' them (Thomas Shepard, 'The Autobiography', in *God's Plot: Puritan Spirituality in Thomas Shepard's Cambridge*, ed. by Michael McGiffert (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), pp. 35–80 (p. 78)).

¹³⁰ Cf., Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 175, p. 182, p. 185, passim; Josselin, *Diary*, ed. by Macfarlane, p. 16, p. 34, p. 76, p. 107, p. 147, passim.

¹³¹ Newcome, *Autobiography*, ed. by Parkinson, I, p. 73.

¹³² Knollys, *The life and death of... Hanserd Knollys*, ed. by Kiffin, p. 5.

¹³³ Cf., Pelling, *The Common Lot*, p. 186. Yet visitors and family members were not the only ones to provide palliative care to the sick. As Michael Stolberg has shown, in the case of fatal illnesses during the early modern period, physicians also provided a *cura palliativa* or 'palliative cure'. This was a treatment that no longer 'pursued a radical, curative goal' but instead 'focused on the alleviation of symptoms' (Michael Stolberg, *A History of Palliative Care, 1500–1970: Concepts, Practices, and Ethical Challenges* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), p. 36.

¹³⁴ Cambers, *Godly Reading*, p. 63.

¹³⁵ Perkins, *A salve for a sicke man*, pp. 103–104; Taylor, *Holy Dying*, p. 120, p. 166; Man, *An amulet... against sicknes and death*, p. 264; M. M., *An ease for a diseased man*, p. 5.

¹³⁶ Underdown, *Fire from Heaven*, p. 223. It should be noted, however, that the majority of relatives looked after their kin because they shared in their sufferings of, as well as their recoveries from, sickness. Elizabeth Isham wrote how when her mother and sister were cured from illnesses she rejoiced because, 'I have ben partakers of the their sufferings so I shall be also of the consolation; which in sum sort I then was in their recovery' (Isham, 'Booke of Remembrance', in *Constructing Elizabeth Isham*, ed. by Eardley, 6v).

companions and relatives.¹³⁷ On the other hand, even where accounts of illness were written down first hand, they were not always guaranteed to be believed and so witnesses were vital.

Thus, despite the fact that many ailing saints were confined to their bedchambers, it was crucial that they not be left isolated and exiled from the rest of their community. This was reinforced in woodcuts of several works of popular piety which represented the sick-bed as surrounded by onlookers (Figure 4). Doubtless many visitors were primarily there as physical carers and spiritual encouragers. Yet visitors also understood their secondary role as observers to record the testimonies and scriptural knowledge of those afflicted by illness.

As a result, St Nicholas' sickness narrative demonstrates the community of saints made visible in that he was constantly attended to by close acquaintances. He recalls how at the outbreak of his sickness,

That friends and I thought I must go:
Their hopes and mine were past.¹³⁸

At the height of his fever, St Nicholas feared that,

Old friends at length must part,¹³⁹

When his health continued to decrease, he recorded how,

friends did think I nearest was
In a short time to die,¹⁴⁰

Finally, he notes how after his recovery,

¹³⁷ Cf., Baxter, *Reliquiae*, ed. by Sylvester, B1r-D1v; Calamy, *The righteous mans death lamented*, pp. 19-20; Janeway, *Death... of Thomas Mowsley... with a brief narrative of his life and death*, A2r-A4v; Knollys, *The life and death of... Hanserd Knollys*, ed. by Kiffin, A2r-A3v.

¹³⁸ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery' (1667), lines 47-48, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 152.

¹³⁹ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery' (1667), line 44, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 152.

¹⁴⁰ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery' (1667), lines 59-60, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 152.

mad'st my friends not so to mourn.¹⁴¹

He was not the only one to stress the importance of maintaining an intimate crowd of witnesses during illness. Many saints called on, and were called upon by, their friends when sick or near death. Robert Blair described how in 1635 one Irish gentlewoman, when she thought that the Lord had called to her 'come away to me', immediately beckoned her 'most familiar friends' to tell them the good news.¹⁴² Oliver Heywood exclaimed that during his ministry in Coley during the 1650s he had learnt, 'O the benefit of good company' which he had seen help saints be 'delivered from occasions' of sickness.¹⁴³ Elizabeth Cavendish Egerton, Countess of Bridgewater, implored God in her manuscript account of her illness to 'bless all my neere friends, and still give me the comfort of their lifes'.¹⁴⁴ In 1661, when Mary Warren lay sick in London, she was visited by local radical ministers like Henry Jessey, John Simpson and one 'Mr. Palmer' from Gloucestershire; neighbours like 'Mr. Greensmith and his Wife'; a 'grave Matron' and 'widow Mrs Adkins'; as well as 'divers other Christian friends'.¹⁴⁵ Thomas Clarke declared that when the plague hit his house in 1666, killing two of his children and making three servants of his household gravely ill, that,

neighbours have been very kind to me
In this my long and sad extremity.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery' (1667), line 63, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 152.

¹⁴² Blair, *Autobiography*, ed. by M'Crie, p. 105. Similarly, William Cowper, while he lay ill in bed in 1619, 'kept with all that came to visit him in most holy and Divine conferences' (William Cowper, *The life and death of the Reuerend Father, and faithfull seruant of God, Mr. William Cowper, Bishop of Galloway* (London: 1619), C2r).

¹⁴³ Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 27.

¹⁴⁴ Elizabeth Cavendish Egerton, Countess of Bridgewater, British Library, 'Meditations', MS Egerton 607, fol. 111r. Egerton wrote this, like St Nicholas, under the title 'Upon recovery out of sickness' (fol. 109v).

¹⁴⁵ H. P., *A Looking-glass for children*, p. 11. In 1665 Mary Page, Wife to William Page of Wellingborough in Northampton, was 'amongst Friends' who all 'came about her' when she lay upon her sick-bed (Daniel Willis, *A Relation in part of what passed through a true and faithful servant and handmaid of the Lord, Mary Page, when she lay upon her bed of sickness* (London: 1665), p. 3. All that visited her were so moved by her godly demeanour that they printed this account of her suffering and death).

¹⁴⁶ Clarke, *Meditations in my... sickness*, p. 7.

Thus what Clarke described as ‘Neighbours love’ was not uncommon in English communities during times of sickness.¹⁴⁷ In 1686 the Scottish politician and soldier David Barclay, whose son Robert went on to become a Quaker, had ‘several Friends standing around the bed’ as he lay severely ill.¹⁴⁸ These included not only Barclay’s wife, but his son’s family and father-in-law with his own two daughters, an apothecary, friends from Aberdeen, and Patrick Livingston the presiding minister.¹⁴⁹ In the sight of such a gathering the frail Barclay cited Psalm 133.1 in exclaiming, ‘How precious a thing it is, to see brethren dwell together’.¹⁵⁰ Having visitors assured St Nicholas and others that their scripturalism would be recorded, attested and hopefully imitated by others.

The Providence of Recovery

With a crowd of witnesses around them, the sick had to show God’s agency. They did this by imparting to observers (and later readers of their accounts) just how severe their illnesses were, and by inference how miraculous their recoveries had been. In this way, the writing of such accounts could downplay the efficacy of human curatives (professional or amateur) to emphasize heavenly healing. This approach served two purposes. It demonstrated the fleshy fragility of the writer (whose body was prone to ailments because of sin) whilst simultaneously serving as a material proof of divine intervention (and assurance of salvation). Both of these legitimised the individual’s experience of suffering as worthy of recording so as to be read and imitated by others.

Early on in his account, when St Nicholas describes the onset of his fever, he draws from a particular biblical passage to demonstrate his healing as a sign of heavenly providence. This was Psalm 90.3 which in the Authorized Version read:

Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men

¹⁴⁷ Clarke, *Meditations in my... sickness*, p. 12. This was as true in Scotland as it was in England. Anne Halkett described that in the 1640s at Fyvie, Aberdeenshire, ‘During my sicknese I was much obleiged to the frequentt visitts of most of ye ladys thereaboutts, but particularly the Lady Ardrose; and Mr. D. Forcett and Mr. H. Rimer seldome missed a day of beeing with mee. They were pious good men, and there Conversation was very agreeable to mee’ (Anne Halkett, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, ‘Meditations’, Add. MS. 32376, fol. 51r). For more examples, see Brady, ‘The Gift of Mourning’, in *Emotions in the Household*, ed. by Broomhall, pp. 192-193.

¹⁴⁸ Jaffray, *Diary*, ed. by Barclay, p. 434.

¹⁴⁹ Jaffray, *Diary*, ed. by Barclay, pp. 432-434.

¹⁵⁰ Jaffray, *Diary*, ed. by Barclay, p. 434.



Figure 4. Both these images emphasize the need for witnesses when near death and the spectacle of dying. (Top) An engraving from the anonymous broadside *The dying tears of a penitent sinner* (London: 1678–1681). The dying man is surrounded by his ‘dear Wife and Children all’.¹⁵¹ A book, symbolic of the Bible, lays open before him. Like many of the sickness narratives discussed in this chapter, the dying man’s hands are deliberately raised as a gesture of praise or prayer. (Bottom) An engraving from the anonymous broadside *The dying mans good counsel to his children and friends* (London: 1679). In the tradition of the *ars moriendi*, the ‘dying man’ offers minatory advice addressing those around him, ‘All you that stands about my bed/And here is come my death to view/Think on my words when I am dead/And what I speak you’ll find them true’. Though the ‘dying man’ is depicted without a Bible, he admonishes his friends and family to ‘mind your Bibles’ so that they might God’s ‘holy Word obey’.

¹⁵¹ For similar examples see the frontispieces to, Christopher Sutton, *Disce mori. = Learne to die* (London: 1613); Lancelot Andrewes, *A manual of directions for the sick* (London: 1648).

St Nicholas paraphrases this as:

Thou to destruction with a word
Canst bring the sons of men;
And when thou pleasest, canst afford
To say, 'Return again!'¹⁵²

St Nicholas' use of this scripture was not arbitrary but rather had a wide precedent in English Protestant theology.

English clergymen used this passage not just to explain that it was God's prerogative to end life with sickness, but to save sufferers from it too. John Brinsley, a Presbyterian minister based in Great Yarmouth, explained this in a spring sermon subsequently printed as *The Healing of Israels Breaches* (1641). Here he argued that though '*Physitians* leave a man, and give him over, then it is Gods time to take him in hand, which oft-times he doth, restoring & raising him with great facility and celerity, beyond his owne, and others expectation'. Brinsley's evidence for this came from Psalm 90.3, '*Turning man to destruction, he then saith, Come againe ye Children of men*'.¹⁵³ Thomas Hooker in a sermon from his time at Chelmsford in Essex, and later printed as *The Application of Redemption by the Effectual Work of the Word* (1656), used Psalm 90.3 to encourage saints that if the greatest sickness of all was sin, God's people must suffer under it before they are healed from it. Hooker proposed that if the 'soul finds sin as a plague' the sinner's 'heart must be broken to pieces under the weight of the evil of sin' before it is delivered from it. This is, Hooker argued, why the Psalmist had said of God, '*Thou bringest man to the dust of death*' in order to then '*sayest, return ye children of men*'.¹⁵⁴

Hooker's conception of Psalm 90.3 fell in line with other Calvinist works that described any kind of sickness as a product of sin.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, though it was

¹⁵² St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery' (1667), lines 13-16, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 151.

¹⁵³ John Brinsley, *The healing of Israels breaches. Wherein is set forth Israels disease. Cure. Physitian. Danger* (London: 1642), p. 121.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas Hooker, *The application of redemption by the effectual work of the word, and spirit of Christ, for the bringing home of lost sinners to God* (London: 1656), p. 9. Also see a sermon in Kensington delivered by an Independent minister, John Everard, *The Gospel treasury opened* (London: 1657), p. 303.

¹⁵⁵ Cf., John Reading, *A faire warning Declaring the comfortable use both of sicknesse and health* (London: 1621), pp. 38-56; Taylor, *Holy Dying*, pp. 188-194; Willis, *A help for the poor who are visited*

advisable to repent during illness, the use of Psalm 90.3 emphasized that repentance (just like sick prayers and covenants) did not guarantee physical healing. Rather, it was God who determined the length of one's life span. Several printed funeral sermons at the time used Psalm 90.3 to reinforce this message.¹⁵⁶

Therefore, St Nicholas' use of Psalm 90.3 acknowledged the dualistic meaning of this scriptural verse. Whether or not God chose to heal his saints on earth from illness, or call them to eternal life in heaven by it, it was the role of believers to resign themselves to either fate. After St Nicholas had quoted Psalm 90.3 he went on to explicate it. Some 30 lines later he outlines how serious his condition was, and thus how spectacular his recovery from it had been. He describes being suddenly struck with:

A burning fever, which did so
My natural moisture waste
That friends and I thought I must go:
Their hopes and mine were past.¹⁵⁷

Due to these 'symptoms of declining' St Nicholas believed,

I nearest was
In a short time to die.¹⁵⁸

However, he was soon restored to health and, as his title for his manuscript hymn made clear, he was offering up a thanksgiving for a 'Recovery out of a Dangerous Sickness'.

with the plague, D3r-D5r; Thomas Clarke, *Meditations in my confinement, when my house was visited with the sickness* (London: 1666), p. 20.

¹⁵⁶ William Harrison, *Deaths aduantage little regarded, and The soules solace against sorrow Preached in two funerall sermons at Childwal in Lancashire at the buriall of Mistris Katherin Brettergh the third of June. 1601* (London: 1602), p. 40; Thomas Gataker, *Two funeral sermons much of one and the same subiect* (London: 1620), B2v; John Chetwynd, *The dead speaking, or, The living names of two deceased ministers of Christ (contemporary, and eminently usefull in the west of England) viz. Mr. Sam. Oliver, and Mr. Samuel Crook Containing the sermon at the funeralls of the one preached by John Chetwind, B.D.* (London: 1654), p. 75.

¹⁵⁷ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery' (1667), lines 45-48, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 152.

¹⁵⁸ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery' (1667), lines, 33-36, 59-60, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 152.

This was because his recovery was one only God and not man could have wrought. As St Nicholas stated later in his hymn:

And now when through this vale of tears
Thy providential thread,
As through a labyrinth of fears
Had thy poor servant led.

[...]

'Twas none but a great God that could
Do such great things as these!¹⁵⁹

St Nicholas was not alone in elucidating the 'providential thread' of Psalm 90.3 by expressing such a close call to, then deliverance from, death. Many manuscript texts in prose which chronicled sickness did the same thing. These did not directly reference Psalm 90.3. Rather their presentation of divine deliverance from a seemingly deadly illness served as an appropriate shorthand for it. Like St Nicholas, these accounts relayed again and again how sufferers and their observers (medical, clerical, or familial) thought that they would surely perish until they were miraculously healed by the Almighty.

Mary Rich recounted in her journal how in 1648 she contracted the smallpox whereby 'Dr. Wright, my physician, believed I would die'. Mercifully 'it pleased God, by his means, to save my life' and Rich lived another thirty years.¹⁶⁰ Henry Newcome described a similar instance of God's restorative power in his diary. This occurred in 1653 when his three-year-old son Henry junior contracted the same disease as Rich. Newcome relayed how he was brought 'very low, insomuch that physician and friends doubted of his recovery'. Needless to say, the elder Henry was able to give praise as it 'pleased God to recover him' and the child lived another sixty years.¹⁶¹ In 1671 Nathaniel Heywood suffered from a severe fever which carried all the symptoms of being deadly. His attending physician was described as having 'left him as hopeless, and said it was in vain to give him any thing'. Nevertheless, his biographer described

¹⁵⁹ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery' (1667), lines 79-80, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 153.

¹⁶⁰ Rich, *Autobiography*, ed. by Croker, p. 25.

¹⁶¹ Newcome, *Autobiography*, ed. by Parkinson, I, p. 43.

how ‘God had mercy upon him’.¹⁶² Nathaniel fully revived within a few days and lived for another six years. Mary Penington recounted a similarly dangerous illness in a manuscript left to her family. She wrote how in 1680, after a prolonged fever, ‘my physician and others about me believing I could never recover’ and yet, after some convalescence, she did recover and gave thanks for the ‘merciful dealings of the Lord with me’.¹⁶³ Penington lived another two years.

Not just manuscript accounts, but also printed prose accounts of sickness also framed themselves as near-death experiences. These were influenced by Psalm 90.3. Their descriptions of dramatic recoveries were intended to reveal how during infirmity God had ‘sayest, return ye children of men’. In his autobiography, the Particular Baptist William Kiffin related how when he was visited with a ‘fit of sickness’ in 1639 ‘all my friends [were] giving me over as a dying man’.¹⁶⁴ Kiffin, however, remarked that ‘it pleased God to restore me’ in a matter of weeks.¹⁶⁵ He lived another sixty-two years. A similar record occurs in Kiffin’s printed edition of the biography of his long-time friend and co-religionist Hanserd Knollys. Entitled *The Life and Death of... Mr Hanserd Knollys* (1692) this work contained many passages written by Knollys’ own hand but printed by Kiffin some twenty years later. In it Knollys described visiting an ailing widow in Gainsborough in 1629. He observed how the ‘Doctor of Physick had given her over’ as beyond treatment, and ‘some godly Ministers, Friends and Relations did take leave of her as a Dying Woman’. Yet a little while after she was found declaring: ‘The LORD hath healed me, I am restored to Health’.¹⁶⁶ Likewise a marvellous recovery is chronicled in Edward Bagshaw’s edition of *The Life and Death of Mr Vavasor Powell* (1671). Taken from Powell’s own self-writing, this described how when the Welsh clergyman fell seriously ill in the 1640s, ‘both of Physicians and Friends, and in my own expectation I was a dying man’.¹⁶⁷ Nonetheless, he describes

¹⁶² Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 464. His elder brother, Oliver Heywood, had a similar experience. Cf., Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 230.

¹⁶³ Penington, *Life of Mary Penington*, p. 55. For an example written by a Scottish Covenanter see James Nimmo, *Narrative of Mr James Nimmo: written for his own satisfaction, to keep in some remembrance the Lord’s ways, dealings, and kindness towards him, 1654–1709*, ed. by W. G. Scott Moncrieff (Scottish History Society, 1889), p. 99.

¹⁶⁴ William Kiffin, *Remarkable passages in the life of William Kiffin*, ed. by William Orme (London: 1823), p. 19.

¹⁶⁵ Kiffin, *Remarkable passages in the life of William Kiffin*, ed. by Orme, p. 20.

¹⁶⁶ Knollys, *The life and death of... Hanserd Knollys*, ed. by Kiffin, p. 5.

¹⁶⁷ Bagshaw, *The life and death of Mr Vavasor Powell*, p. 12.

how the ‘Lord added the mercie of natural life and health’ whereby his illness abated.¹⁶⁸ Powell lived another thirty years.

In this way sickness narratives in England echoed the primacy of the Almighty over life and death as depicted in Psalm 90.3.¹⁶⁹ Writers heightened the active agency of God. As John Greene, a recorder of London, wrote in his diary, ‘Man’s extremity is still God’s opportunity’.¹⁷⁰ Recovery was seen as more remarkable in that the ill were initially described as so close to ‘dying’, given up as dead by physicians, family and friends. This is why St Nicholas, who only lived for less than six months after his recovery hymn was written, praises God for his triumph over a fever. For it was to be a sign and a token of his eternal inheritance. He, along with these other writers, emphasized the severity of their sicknesses which seemed to indicate that they were ‘In a short time to die’.¹⁷¹ This was to demonstrate that the greater their recovery from infirmity on earth, the greater their assurance of a final resurrection in heaven.

Sickness as a Prompt to Will-Making

Lastly, sickness narratives often demonstrated how illness was a sign from God to make a last Will and Testament. Authors did this by citing a specific biblical passage:

(Isaiah 38.1) In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.

St Nicholas uses this scripture to note how the Almighty had during his sickness:

sent’st a summons, seemed to say,
‘Now set thine house and heart

¹⁶⁸ Bagshaw, *The life and death of Mr Vavasor Powell*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁶⁹ Sickness as a divine herald of death loomed large in the early modern imagination. Perkins argued that ‘afflictions and calamities of this life are as it were the harbingers and pur[s]uiers of death’ (Perkins, *A salve for a sicke man*, p. 82). Becon explained that for many ‘God hath sent this sicknes unto me as a messenger, to afore warne me of my departure from this world’ (Thomas Becon, *The sycke mans salve* (London: 1561), p. 131).

¹⁷⁰ E. M. Symonds, ‘The Diary of John Greene {1635–57}’, *The English Historical Review*, 44.173 (January 1929), pp. 106-117 (p. 107).

¹⁷¹ St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery’ (1667), line 60, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 152.

In order...'¹⁷²

St Nicholas' meaning here is unmistakable. Several printed polemics had used this scripture to emphasize the necessity of will-making during illness.¹⁷³ After quoting 'Isa. 38.1' in the margins of *A Salve for a Sicke Man*, William Perkins wrote that 'if the Will be unmade, it is with godly advise and counsell to be made in the time of sicknesse'.¹⁷⁴ Equally the polemicist and poet Rachel Speght, in *Mortalities Memorandum* (1621), prompted by the death of her mother less than a year earlier, explicated Isaiah 38.1 as:

When *Hezekiah Judahs* King was sicke,
And at the entrie of *Deaths* dore did lye,
The Prophet *Esay* came to him, sayd,
Put thou thy house in order, thou must die;
Which paradigm plainly doth ingrave
[...]
For setling and disposing our estate
To those, whom we intend shall have a share.¹⁷⁵

Oliver Heywood in *Meetness for Heaven* (1679) also agreed that 'When King *Hezekiah* was sick unto death God sends him this Message; *Set thine house in order, for thou shalt dye and not live, Isa. 38.1. (i. e. Make thy Will, and dispose of thy domestical concerns)*'.¹⁷⁶ Jeremy Taylor, in his *Holy Dying*, talked of those who in sickness

¹⁷² St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise Upon My Recovery' (1667), lines 41, 50, 42-43, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 152.

¹⁷³ Isaiah 38 had a long history in early modern English devotional practises. It was part of a set of earlier prayers of 'satisfaction' for the dead in the Catholic *Dirige*. It was then transformed under reformed theology into a prayer of thankfulness for God's unmerited mercy during illness. Cf., Micheline White, 'Dismantling Catholic Primers and Reforming Private Prayer: Anne Lock, Hezekiah's Song and Psalm 50/51', in *Private and Domestic Devotion*, ed. by Martin and Ryrie, pp. 93-113. The wide assimilation of Isaiah 38 supports Walsham's belief in the continuity between early English Protestantism and medieval Catholicism. She argues that the English Reformation, 'rejuvenated and sustained older patterns of thought by clothing them in a new ideological coat' (Walsham, *Providence*, p. 87).

¹⁷⁴ William Perkins, *A salve for a sicke man. or, A treatise containing the nature, differences, and kindes of death as also the right manner of dying well* (London: 1611), pp. 145-146. Also cf., M. M., *An ease for a diseased man*, p. 14.

¹⁷⁵ Rachel Speght, *Mortalities memorandum* (London: 1621), p. 36; also see p. 24.

¹⁷⁶ Oliver Heywood, *Meetness for heaven promoted in some brief meditations upon Colos. 1. 12. discovering the nature and necessity of habitual and actual meetness for heaven here, in all that hope for heaven hereafter. Designed for a funeral legacy* (London: 1679), p. 64.

neglect to ‘set their house in order... such as are, dying Intestate, leaving estates intangled, and some Relatives unprovided for’ by not writing a will.¹⁷⁷ These concerns were reiterated in the 1559 and 1662 editions of the BCP. Here Church of England ministers were advised, when visiting their sick parishioners, to ‘*let him then be admonished to make his will... to take order for the settling of their temporal estates*’.¹⁷⁸

Consequently, several lay and clerical writers appeared aware of the meaning of this passage only setting their ‘house in order’ during illness, and very often close to death. Vavasor Powell exclaimed in 1658 that, when the strange sickness that afflicted him was at its ‘highest and sorest’, after having read Isaiah 38 he found that, ‘I was much troubled about my Will, and was afraid the Lord would have taken me away before I had finished it’.¹⁷⁹ Mary Rich felt stirred to consider her will after ‘readeing of Hesebias message’ during one of her nightly Bible readings when her husband lay in ‘violent paine’.¹⁸⁰ When Nathaniel Heywood lay faint from fever in 1671, his tongue black and swollen, his physician declared ‘let him set all things in order, and make his will, for he is a gone man’.¹⁸¹ Though he soon recovered, Nathaniel only made his will the day before he died six years later.¹⁸² Two months earlier Richard Mather, as his health began to decline, wrote in the preamble of his will that ‘*the will of God [is] that a man should set his House in order before he depart this life, [Thus] Do [I] make this my last Will and Testament*’.¹⁸³ Philip Henry made his will on 17 February 1665 after a

¹⁷⁷ Taylor, *Holy Dying*, p. 152.

¹⁷⁸ Church of England, ‘The Book of Common Prayer, 1559’, in *The Book of Common Prayer*, ed. by Cummings, p. 166; Church of England, ‘The Book of Common Prayer, 1662’, in *The Book of Common Prayer*, ed. by Cummings, p. 445. For a fuller discussion of the religious issues surrounding will-making more generally during this period see Peter Carlson, ‘The Art and Craft of Dying’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion*, ed. by Andrew Hiscock and Helen Wilcox (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017), pp. 634-649 (pp. 641-644).

¹⁷⁹ Bagshaw, *The life and death of Mr Vavasor Powell*, p. 93. It was sickness that made James Melville write out his will. However, then a prisoner at Barwick Castle, he was so ill he was unable to sign it on the 25 February 1613. Cf., Melville, *Autobiography*, ed. by Pitcairn, pp. 1i-1iii.

¹⁸⁰ Qtd. in Cambers, *Godly Reading*, p. 63.

¹⁸¹ Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 464. Robert Blair described how one woman in 1635 ‘set all things in order in the house’ when she realised that she ‘was sick enough for her bed’, fearing that she may never leave it (Blair, *Autobiography*, ed. by M’Crie, p. 105).

¹⁸² Heywood, *Memoirs*, ed. by Slate, p. 499. Sir Thomas Steward only wrote his last testament when he lay sick at Ely in January 1635. Having died at the end of that month he left everything to his sister’s son – Oliver Cromwell (Cromwell, *Letters*, ed. by Carlyle and Lomas, I, p. 74). Simeon Ashe was very ‘frail’ when he put his affairs in order in December 1661, dying less than a year later. Cf., Ann Hughes, ‘Ashe, Simeon (d. 1662)’, *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, January 2008.

¹⁸³ Mather, *The life and death of... Mr. Richard Mather*, p. 34. Sometimes will-making during sickness could prove slightly premature. Elizabeth Isham described how in 1617 ‘my Granmother in this time of her sicknes had her will maid, and disposed of that she had’, and ‘having recovred’ afterwards ‘contented

restless night of pain in his limbs. As he explained in his diary, ‘I made my will, not knowing but it [his pain] may bee a Summons to Death, however tis not amiss to have my house alwayes in order’.¹⁸⁴

This was not the case with the somewhat improvident St Nicholas. Although he used Isaiah 38.1 to indicate that he believed that his fever was a ‘summons’ to write out his own will, unfortunately, unlike his father before him, he was never able to complete it.¹⁸⁵ He, no doubt like many others, both then and now, left it too late expecting that he had more time to write it. However, his use of Isaiah 38.1 reveals how the sick drew both solace and anxiety from this biblical text when writing about their illnesses. For it reminded them of the urgency of setting their earthly inheritance in order, whilst simultaneously encouraging them to look ahead to their heavenly one.

Conclusion

The sheer frequency of sickness during the seventeenth century may be one way to explain why St Nicholas and other authors wrote about their experience of it. Yet their accounts were more than casual observations of the high morbidity and mortality rates of the age in which they lived. Through their use of the English Bible, in the words and acts they performed, English laity and clergy alike could participate in a recognised pattern of piety to be conducted at the sick-bed and deathbed. This reveals that there was a wide consensus on what coping with sickness and dying well should look and sound like in the early modern sick-chamber.

This chapter has shown how, in spite of sacramental dissimilarities, scriptural similarities within sickness accounts ensured that a kind of bipartisanship (intentional or accidental) stretched across religious, political, generational, geographic and gender distinctions.¹⁸⁶ This is seen in the accounts echoed by St Nicholas and Edmund Trench

her selfe’ to live off what she had not already given away (Isham, ‘Booke of Remembrance’, in *Constructing Elizabeth Isham*, ed. by Eardley, 6r).

¹⁸⁴ Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 168. Henry preached what he practised. When visiting one of his ailing parishioners, one Walter Adams, in the spring of 1670, Henry relays how he persuaded him to write his will by instructing ‘him to set his house in order, wh[ich] was undone’, to which Adams ‘promised hee would speedily’ (Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 225). Similarly, Stephen Newcome, the vicar of Caldecot and father of the dissenter Henry Newcome, ‘finding himself weak’ from a sudden bout of sickness in early 1641, ‘sent for Mr. Loftus, an attorney, to make his will’. After completing it he died a few days later (Newcome, *Autobiography*, ed. by Parkinson, I, p. 5).

¹⁸⁵ For St Nicholas’ father’s will see Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, Kent, Prc 32/48/32.

¹⁸⁶ Scripture allowed English writers to create a shared pattern of sick-bed piety that did not infringe on their otherwise distinct religious practices during illness. For disagreements over final confessions as an

(English Independents), Ralph Josselin and Robert Evelyn (English Conformers); William Kiffin and Hanserd Knollys (English Particular Baptists), Adam Martindale, Simeon Ashe, Philip Henry, John Angier and Oliver and Nathaniel Heywood (English Presbyterians); Isaac and Mary Pennington (English Quakers); Vavasor Powell (Welsh Independent); and Robert Blair, Walter Pringle and James Nimmo (Scottish Covenanters).

We have encountered the same doctrinal advice on dealing with sickness by episcopal clergymen and dissenting ministers alike. *Ars moriendi* works by low churchmen (such as William Perkins and Thomas Becon) and by high churchmen (such as Jeremy Taylor and Lancelot Andrewes) all expressed the same biblical injunctions. More importantly, we have seen how this advice was practically followed by the sick.

We have also come across accounts that show the shared ground not just between male authors, but between female authors as well. From lay saints like Mary Pennington, Mary Warren, Elizabeth Isham and Hope Winter, to noblewomen like Mary Rich and Alice Wandesford. Moreover, the subjects of these accounts of sickness have ranged from all ages: from eight to ninety-two years old. As have the types of afflictions: from fever, gout, measles, cuts, falls, palsy to plague. All revealed a shared use of scripture recorded at and around the English sick-bed.

This chapter has also shown, however, how biblical prescriptions on infirmity were not always cohesive or choate. Though it was easy to write or speak out scriptural verses during health, it was difficult to apply them in sickness. Sick-bed covenants (based on Psalm 39.13) were ill-advised to make and even harder to keep; seeing sickness as a summons to write a will (based on Isaiah 38.1) ensured that many were not well enough to do so; demonstrating patience during illness (based on Psalm 116.13) was not plausible or even desirable when in agony; and visiting the sick (based on Matthew 25.35-37) not only proved a tremendous strain on clergymen but risked

absolute guarantor to salvation, see Andrewes, *Directions for the Sick*, p. 73-4; Becon, *The sycke mans salve*, p. 70; Taylor, *Holy Dying*, pp. 188-194; Robert Horne, *Life and Death, Foure Sermons* (London: 1613), p. 116; Perkins, *A salve for a sicke man*, pp. 56-59; Isaac Ambrose, *Media* (London: 1650), p. 67. For debates over the application of anointing oil over the sick, see Kiffin, *Life*, pp. 105-106; Bagshaw, *The life and death of Mr Vavasor Powell*, p. 41. For the importance, or lack thereof, of final communion at the deathbed, see Taylor, *Holy Dying*, pp. 268-281; John Jenney, *A sermon preached at the funeral of the right honble the Lady Frances Paget* (London: 1673), pp. 23-24; Richard Wroe, *The funeral of the right worshipful Sir Roger Bradshaigh* (London: 1684), pp. 17-19. For disputes over the healing of the sick by angels, see Peter Marshall, 'Angels around the Deathbed: Variations on a Theme in the English Art of Dying', in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), pp. 83-103.

spreading infection and increasing fatalities. Accounts like St Nicholas' show the hortatory as well as the minatory influence of scripture (and the printed texts that elucidated it) on sick-bed behaviours. Whether such encounters were based in truth or merely hyperbolic we will perhaps never know.¹⁸⁷ What matters is that a biblical paradigm of writing about and acting during sickness had become commonplace from the Long Reformation onwards.

Such a consensus strongly implies that sickness narratives were read and circulated just as much as they were written. In 1673 the Independent minister Thomas Brooks published an account of the deathbed scene of Susanna Bell because,

Tis the good, profit, and advantage of all your souls, and theirs into whose hands this little Piece may fall, that has drawn me out to write so large an Epistle. If I had had only the dead in my eye, a few lines should have serv'd the turn.¹⁸⁸

Many printed funeral sermons used similar arguments as part of their defence for their descriptions of the final acts of saints at the deathbed (often taken from the diaries of the deceased).¹⁸⁹ As George Ferebe succinctly put it in one funeral sermon of 1615, 'I say, that these dead images are *vivorum libri*, living mens bookes'.¹⁹⁰ Whether the departed intended them to be read or not, such articles of writing saw the piety of the dead informing that of the living.

Such notions could be seen as lugubrious. Yet sickness narratives did not merely catalogue their illnesses, 'groaning and complaining', or demonstrate the medical

¹⁸⁷ Although it is important to note that sick men were often seen as honest men. When John Digby's allegiance to Protestantism was questioned by Parliament he pointed to the 'testimonies' of those who had witnessed his speeches during his sickness as proof of his true faith. He added that in such a condition '(no man can be supposed to dissemble with the World, being ready to leave it)' (John Rushworth, *Historical collections of private passages of state* (London: 1659), p. 275). John of Gaunt in *Richard II* put it more eloquently: 'Oh, but they say the tongues of dying men/Enforce attention like deep harmony./Where words are scarce they are seldom spent in vain,/For they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain' (William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, in *The RSC Shakespeare: Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), II.1.5-8).

¹⁸⁸ Thomas Brooks, *The legacy of a dying mother to her mourning children* (London: 1673), p. 42.

¹⁸⁹ Cf., John Barlow, *Hierons last fare-well* (London: 1618), p. 6; Hughes, *The Art of Embalming Dead Saints*, pp. 51-52; John Collinges, *Faith & experience; or, A short narration of the holy life and death of Mary Simpson* (London: 1649), B4r; Daniel Greenwood, *Two sermons... at the funerall of Mr. Francis Croke... the other at the funerall of Alexander Croke* (London: 1680), pp. 14-17.

¹⁹⁰ George Ferebe, *Lifes farewell. Or A funerall sermon preached at Saint Johns in the Deuises in Wilshire... At the funerall of John Drew Gentleman* (London: 1615), p. 25.

‘means to get up again’ by which they had overcome them – as some critics decried.¹⁹¹ Instead they recorded their infirmities not to ‘aggrandize’ their ‘Performances’ but to *share* rather than just *show* them.¹⁹² For in sharing them, whether verbally or textually, people would see that they resembled the sick-bed scenes of others. Here slowly but surely a comprehensive pattern of reading and writing emerged. As Matthew Henry exclaimed, saints became ‘more desirous to be told how we may carry our selves well in our sickness, and get good to our souls by it, than whether we shall recover by it’.¹⁹³ It was the accounts of ‘divers sickly and ill’ men and women of England that made sickness writing as popular as it was profitable.¹⁹⁴

If this body of literature was about proliferation, it was also about self-preservation. The exemplars left behind by dying men and women were a corollary of a theological imperative. As James Janeway warned in his *Legacy to his Friends* (1674), English Protestants were obligated to do this in light of the Final Judgement. He argued, using Malachi 3.16, that if saints did not write about their illnesses and convalescences, God would do it for them:

Remember your Dangers and Deliverances, for God Records them; they are filled up by God, and he will mind you of them another day if you forget them now; he keeps his Journals and Records, he hath his Book of Remembrance of your forgotten Mercies as well as your forgotten sins; God will one day read over all those Deliverances you have forgotten.¹⁹⁵

St Nicholas said much the same in his poem ‘Of Sickness’ (1667), which preceded his recovery hymn in his manuscript and repeated some of the hymn’s material. Like Janeway, St Nicholas, through a series of aphorisms, emphasized the duty of recording sick-bed vows and recoveries from illness in anticipation of a final reckoning:

¹⁹¹ Harley, ‘The Theology of Affliction’, in *Religio Medici*, ed. by Grell and Cunningham, p. 279.

¹⁹² Thomas Gipps, *Remarks on remarks, or, The Rector of Bury’s sermon vindicated* (London: 1698), p. 61.

¹⁹³ Harley, ‘The Theology of Affliction’, in *Religio Medici*, ed. by Grell and Cunningham, p. 281.

¹⁹⁴ Josselin, *Diary*, ed. by Macfarlane, p. 159.

¹⁹⁵ James Janeway, *James Janeway’s legacy to his friends containing twenty seven famous instances of Gods providences in and about sea dangers and deliverances, with the names of several that were eye witnesses to many of them : whereunto is added a sermon on the same subject* (London: 1674), p. 124. Malachi 3.16 read, ‘Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name’.

Alas, how apt are we to put away
Or to forget th'approaching evil day.

[...]

Sickness, like winter, helps us to grow wise,
And all our summer mercies better prize.

[...]

Teach me, O Lord, to read thy justice in
These hard charácters, and spell out my sin.

[...]

Teach me to read thy mercy, and to own
Thy kindness, even when thou seem'st to frown.
Keep up a sickness frame of spirit upon
My soul; and if thou cause this to be gone,
Help me to mind and keep the vows that I
Am apt to make in mine extremity.¹⁹⁶

St Nicholas' anaphoric emphasis in the above poem to 'Teach me, O Lord, to read thy justice... Teach me to read thy mercy' was somewhat ironic. For though he may have desired to 'spell out' more effectively the 'hard charácters' of his sin and of God's providential dealings towards him, he was adept at interpreting the cosmic 'mercy' and 'justice' exerted upon others. This was no truer than in poems where he discussed the fate of parliamentarians, Royalists and the Dutch during the conflicts of the 1640s–50s. His paraphrastic deployment of the Psalms during the Civil War and his emulation of

¹⁹⁶ Thomas St Nicholas, 'Of Sickness' (1667), lines 13-14, 29-30, 41-2, 47-52, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 146-147. This is why he chronicles his ailments throughout his manuscript verse from the pain of a 'loose tooth', to a sudden 'sick fit', surviving a 'fall' from a horse; almost being 'drowned', enduring 'Through plagues' and a 'burning fever', his 'rheumatic catarrhs' and chronic 'shaking palsy'. See respectively, Thomas St Nicholas, 'Upon the Pulling Out of a Loose Tooth, February 15, 1662' (1663), lines 1-18, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 62; St Nicholas, 'Of Sickness' (1667), line 25, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 146; St Nicholas, 'Upon a Fall from an Horse' (1648), lines 1-16, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 43; St Nicholas, 'An Hymn Of Praise Occasioned by... Deliverance... from... an Extraordinary Sudden Flood... 1663', line 27, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 67; St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise Upon My Recovery' (1667), lines 29, 45, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 151-2; St Nicholas, 'Upon My Shaking Palsy' (1667-1668), line 4, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 163.

battle hymns during the Interregnum is the subject of the next two chapters. These examinations also mark a shift in focus, as they pay much greater attention to the influence of printed poetry rather than printed prose works upon his compositions.

SECTION II:
SACRED SONGS

CHAPTER THREE

‘To hear what peals of psalms they forth did ring’: The Psalm Culture of Parliamentarianism during the English Civil War

Extracts from *For My Son* (1643)

Thus stripped of all, now I was hardly pressed
 For my proportion of what was assessed
 On Rotherham, which by neighbours there was set
 At fifty pounds, which, when I could not get,
 The earl’s commissioners a warrant sent
 To bring me *coram*. Away straight I went
 Before them, where they did most freely bang me
 With ‘rascal’, ‘traitor’, and with threats to hang me.
 My fifty pounds they asked for; I said
 They had my means, I could have else well paid
 That sum and more; my credit now was gone.
 I could not pay that sum; I could pay none.
 To bore out a man’s eyes, and then for nought
 But for not reading t’hang him was, methought,
 Hard justice; but it seems so did not they.
 They bid the marshal straight: ‘Take him away!’
 Away went I with my new servant guarded,
 Who for his service looked to be rewarded
 (A Dutchman, whom in England few could well
 For swearing, drinking, whoring parallel),
 Unto a private room in Sheffield, where I found
 Some fellow pris’ners that were round and sound.
 Some other there again I met with which
 Were guilty of no crime but being rich;
 No crime at least i’the new account, no schism,
 No new-stamped treason callèd roundheadism; (lines 185-210)

*Watson, Provost-
 Marshal gen[er]al*

[...]

And yet next morn to hear these caged birds sing,
 To hear what peals of psalms they forth did ring,
 To see their spirits not yet by these brought under,
 Made their poor friends rejoice, their foes to wonder;
 Would make a neuter in the cause believe
 These men have somewhat whereupon to live,
 Somewhat within when all without is gone,
 The cause they fought for sure is right or none.
 And now, when like one wave upon another,
 The news comes still: this captain's slain and tother –
 Our friends have lost the field, were fain retreat –
 Bradford's the next design – Bradford's beset –
 Bradford is in great straits – poor Bradford's taken,
 Their powder first all spent – Leeds is forsaken,
 Because no colour for resistance left
 When they were thus of neighbours' help bereft
 And their own powder growing low – now all
 Our forces scattered are. (lines 541-558)

[...]

Now must my muse sit down and like the dove
 Mourn and breathe sighs to him that is above,
 And in sad silence trickle tears amain
 Till God shall smile upon us once again.
 And is there no hope left concerning this?
 Is there no healing for us left, and is
 His mercy gone for ever, or his arm
 Shortened that cure it cannot all this harm?
 Had David nothing to support him when
 He was distressed at Ziklag with his men?
 God was once found o'the top o'the mount whenas
 Poor Isaac near to sacrificing was.
 God with a wind, perhaps a north wind, may
 (And the north wind, we read, drives rain away),

*Jer. 14.19**Ps. 77.8**Isa. 50.2**Ezek. 37.10**Prov. 25.23*

In time, together bring these poor, dry bones, *Jer. 31.10*

Put life, make armies of these scattered ones.

The day of small things God will not despise. *Zek. 4.10*

Who shall but God make our poor Jacob rise?

Doth not he see that now our strength is gone, *Deut. 32.36*

That now to help shut up, or left, there's none? (lines 569-588)

[...]

If the great God have firmly so decreed

That he [St Nicholas] shall ne'er his own house see again,

Nor hear of Zion's peace, but here remain

And live and die in this stronghold before

This war be ended, and be seen no more,

God's will be done. (lines 592-597)

[...]

I doubt not but such as are now styled here

'Traitors' and 'rebels' shall ere long appear

The king's best subjects, and their upright ways

Shine like the sun in his most glorious rays.

I doubt not but the subtle wiles and tricks

Of students in the devil's politics,

Of such as papists, prelates, Jesuits are,

Shall be unmasked and to the world made bare. (lines 613-620)

[...]

But howsoever prove issues or events,

Serve God, good kings, and faithful parliaments. (lines 629-630)

This chapter will examine the concluding section of St Nicholas' prison verse epistle *For My Son* (1643) and its engagement with the psalm culture of parliamentarianism. From the 'peals of psalms' sung by his inmates, to his paraphrasing of several key psalm passages, St Nicholas' descriptions will be shown to be no accidental or occasional observations. Rather his ruminations were part of a specific literary culture – one that was theologically Calvinist, politically parliamentarian and grounded in scripture – used by soldiers, preachers and civilians alike.¹ This culture stressed that reading psalters, singing psalms and writing psalm paraphrases were equally potent elements that could be used to identify and galvanise members of the parliamentarian movement during the 1640s.

I argue that St Nicholas' use of specific psalms was linked to this literary culture that used them as expressions of solidarity and resistance during the national conflict. To do this I examine the last 100 lines of *For My Son*.² This passage reveals a litany of psalm paraphrases that reveal an intricate latticework of tonal shifts and thematic undulations. St Nicholas' litany begins with his observation of his fellow prisoners' singing 'peals of plasms' which is linked scripturally to acts of prison praise and defiance (Psalm 142). St Nicholas then addresses the Royalist derisions of such singing through their use of gallows humour (Psalm 51). He follows by reflecting on the sad 'news' of recent military defeats by the Royalists. This prompts his own holy contrition in 'tears amain' which deliberately mimics the Israelites' lament for their captivity at the rivers of Babylon (Psalm 137). St Nicholas then meditates on the nature of persecution, defeat and providence and whether God will aid the forces of Parliament (Psalms 44 and 77). Once assurance of divine relief has been gathered, he moves to a psalm whose rallying cry reflects the social aspirations of Independents and other radical elements in the Army (Psalm 113). St Nicholas concludes with an anti-

¹ By contrast, the exponents of psalm praise by organs and choirs (who opposed the congregations singing of psalms *a cappella*) can be found in the writings of many prominent Laudians and Royalists. For the importance of organs during psalm singing see Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: Volume VII, 1666*, ed. by H. B. Wheatley, 10 vols (London: Harper, 2008), VII, p. 174; Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), p. 3, n.7; Evelyn, *Diary*, ed. by Dobson, II, p. 50. For the importance of choirs during psalm singing see Charles Butler, *The principles of musik in singing and setting. With the two-fold use thereof, ecclesiasticall and civil* (London: 1636), p. 111; Thomas Cheshire, *A sermon preached in Saint Pavles church* (London: 1641), p.11; Peter McCullough, 'Music Reconciled to Preaching: A Jacobean Moment', in *Worship and the Parish Church in Early Modern Britain*, ed. by Natalie Mears and Alec Ryrie (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 109-130 (pp. 116-117).

² The only exception to this is where I examine St Nicholas' use of Psalm 51 in *For My Son* (lines 185-200).

monarchical statement, which ties all his thinking about these psalms, and his use of them, together (Psalm 37). In so doing, St Nicholas reveals himself to be participating in a wider literary culture that saw parliamentarian authors weaponize psalm singing and citing as fit tools to justify their religious and political aims.

The Historiography

Not enough critical study has been undertaken on the cultural practice of English psalm singing and writing during the seventeenth century. A few elements have contributed to this. Firstly, as Hannibal Hamlin argues, in the only recent monograph on the topic *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature*, it is a fairly new field. Hamlin reminds us that the study of early modern psalms as literary objects ‘is just beginning to be explored’.³ Secondly, the sheer ubiquity of the psalms during this period – with their numerous editions and references in plays, lyrics, sermons and pamphlets – makes them appear as popular modes of praise appropriate for all religious peoples.⁴ This has meant that insufficient distinctions have been made among their different uses for worship. A corollary of this is that studies focus on the writing and singing of psalms within varying domestic and ministerial spheres, rather than in specific militaristic and carceral ones, where political and religious allegiances are not clearly recognised.⁵ Thirdly, most scholarship to date focusses on the deployment of psalms in Elizabethan, Jacobean and early Caroline England, or its later use during the Restoration, with very little attempt being made to bridge the historical gap.⁶

All three of these elements have ensured that psalm singing and writing during the Civil War has been largely avoided as a topic of research. Recent doctoral theses certainly reveal a lack of interest in this devotional practice during the 1640s.⁷ Even

³ Hamlin, *Psalm Culture*, p. 16.

⁴ Norton, *Bible as Literature*, I, pp. 115-124; Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, pp. 260-261; Beth Quitslund, ‘The Psalm Book’, in *The Elizabethan Top Ten: Defining Print Popularity in Early Modern England*, ed. by Andy Kesson and Emma Smith (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 203-212.

⁵ Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, pp. 39-53; Hill, *The English Bible*, pp. 351-362; Nicholas Tyacke, *Aspects of English Protestantism, 1530–1700* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001), pp. 125-127.

⁶ Rivkah Zim, *English Metrical Psalms: Poetry as Praise and Prayer, 1535–1601* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), pp. 112-151; Elna Sherman, ‘Ravenscroft’s Psalter, 1621; And Its Place in the Early New England Scene’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 11.1 (September 1948), pp. 32-34; Raymond Craig, ‘Polishing God’s Altar: Puritan Poetics in Cotton’s Singing of Psalms’, in *Early Protestantism and American Culture*, ed. by Michael Schuldiner (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1995), pp. 1-33.

⁷ Sally Drage, ‘The Performance of English Provincial Psalmody c.1690–c.1840’, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2009), in *ETHOS* <<http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?did=1&uin=uk.bl.ethos.522932>> [accessed 12 December 2014], passim; Timothy Charles Duguid, ‘Sing a New Song:

established scholars have appeared seemingly reluctant. John Craig's article 'Psalms, groans and dogwhippers: the soundscape of worship in the English parish church' ends at 1642 and Christopher Deamley's *English Church Music* only starts at 1650.⁸ Christopher Temperley has encouraged such historical lapses in *The Music of the English Parish Church* by arguing that during the early decades of the seventeenth century 'Psalmody had entered a long sleep from which it would hardly be aroused by civil war'.⁹ The recent volume *Psalms in the Early Modern World*, edited by Linda Phyllis Austern, Kari Boyd McBride and David L. Orvis, also does not discuss the importance of these sacred songs during the conflict. In its expansive coverage of the period between 1400–1800, this edited volume of essays says nothing of the oral or literary culture of Civil War psalms.¹⁰ Beth Quitslund in her essay 'Singing the Psalms for Fun and Profit' claims that the 1640s stimulated a 'passionate repudiation of the singing [of] psalms' by radical Calvinists as an attempt to explain away this important cultural phenomenon.¹¹

Those few who have forayed into the Civil War have found little to show in the way of explaining, rather than merely accounting for, psalm singing and writing by parliamentarians. Horton Davies in *Worship and Theology in England* mentions only one example of such singing on the battlefield (Cromwell's use of Psalm 117 at Dunbar) and takes this as a universal indication that such men 'adopted many metrical Psalms as their battle-songs'.¹² Conversely, Christopher Marsh in *Music and Society in Early Modern England* argues for a pattern of Royalist rather than parliamentary psalm singing. Yet his examples take place in churches rather than during combat or

English and Scottish Metrical Psalmody from 1549–1640', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2011), in *EThOS* <<http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?did=5&uin=uk.bl.ethos.563259>> [accessed 10 April 2015], passim.

⁸ John Craig, 'Psalms, Groans and Dogwhippers: The Soundscape of Worship in the English Parish Church, 1547–1642', in *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), pp. 104–123; Christopher Deamley, *English Church Music, 1650–1750: In Royal Chapel, Cathedral, and Parish Church* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970).

⁹ Christopher Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979), I, p. 53.

¹⁰ Linda Phyllis Austern, Kari Boyd McBride and David L. Orvis, 'Introduction', in *Psalms in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Austern, McBride and Orvis (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 1–33.

¹¹ Beth Quitslund, 'Singing the Psalms for Fun and Profit', in *Private and Domestic Devotion*, ed. by Martin and Ryrie, pp. 237–258 (p. 237).

¹² Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 3 vols (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), II, pp. 269–270. Other scholars are equally cursorial. Anne Laurence captures this stereotype well when she describes the 'preaching, praying and psalm-singing soldiers' of Parliament (Anne Laurence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains, 1642–1651* (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press for the Royal Historical Society, 1990), p. 76). The question that is left unanswered in these works is, which psalms, if any, were composed, repeatedly cited and sung?

captivity.¹³ Hamlin is the only scholar to have examined psalms and psalter texts in detail. Hamlin's coverage, however, of the psalms read during this period is disappointingly brief, finding only one case in which 'both sides in the Civil War turned to the same psalm [Psalm 137] for solace or support', and he says nothing of those psalms sung on the battlefield.¹⁴

This has meant that scholarship has taken for granted and misunderstood the culture of writing and singing psalms by parliamentarians during the Civil War. My findings seek to resolve these omissions in knowledge. I examine the deployment of the same psalms across parliamentary texts and how St Nicholas used these to shape his own parliamentarianism. In doing so this chapter contextualises the endurance of what Jonathan Willis has called the Reformation culture of 'psalm-book' Protestantism¹⁵, whilst proving an antecedent for the psalm singing which became one of the defining hallmarks of dissenting praise after the Restoration.¹⁶

The Cultural Context

Despite the fact (whose irony was seemingly lost to both Royalists and Roundheads) that the singing of psalms during combat had been a royal practice, with their first recorded use on the field of battle during the reign of Henry V at the Battle of Agincourt (1415), its employment by soldiers was recorded as widespread within, if not idiosyncratic to, the parliamentary army during the 1640s.¹⁷ Its appropriation by the so-called 'Rebels' may have stemmed from the Elizabethan tradition of mid-summer marches in towns. At these events the defeat of popery was staged as a military battle played out in open fields whose eventual overthrow was marked with the sound of

¹³ Christopher Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), p. 450.

¹⁴ Hamlin, *Psalm Culture*, pp. 250-251.

¹⁵ Jonathan Willis, "'By These Means the Sacred Discourses Sink More Deeply into the Minds of Men": Music and Education in Elizabethan England', *History*, 94.315 (2009), pp. 294-309 (p. 309).

¹⁶ Cf., Burton, *Diary*, ed. by Rutt, I, pp. 849-850; Calamy, *Nonconformists Memorial*, ed. by Palmer, II, p. 14, p. 183, p. 235, p. 396; Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (London: 1673), pp. 572-573; Baxter, *Reliquiae*, ed. by Sylvester, p. 81, p. 83, p. 191, p. 208, p. 249, passim; Sampson Lark, *A Looking-glass for children* (London: 1673), p. 68.

¹⁷ Giovanni Francesco Biondi, *An history of the civill wares of England betweene the two Houses of Lancaster and Yorke* (London: 1641), p. 121, also cf., p. 155, p. 158. This was reiterated by successive monarchs who sang the *Te Deum* after their victories. Thomas Sternhold's *Certayne Psalmes* (1548) also explicitly presents the psalms as texts that had been read and sung at the court of Edward VI. Cf., Hamlin, *Psalm Culture*, p. 26.

‘thankfull psalmes most joyfully soonge’.¹⁸ The Nottinghamshire clergyman Richard Bernard, in his printed military manual *The Bible-Battells. Or the Sacred Art Military* (1629), gave countless examples of biblical and historical armies who ‘When they went towards the Enemy before they came to charge... would sing Psalmes’.¹⁹ Whatever their inspiration, what is clear is that several accounts aimed to create and shore up support for the parliamentary cause by depicting psalms as the preferred battle songs of God’s people.²⁰

This was often noted in manuscript diaries. One example can be found in a diary extract dated a few months prior to St Nicholas’ *For My Son*. The Bradford clothier Joseph Lister reported how soldiers under Sir Thomas Fairfax during the Battle of Leeds (23 January 1643) had ‘sung the 1 verse of the 68 Psalm, *Let God arise, and then his enemies shall be scattered*’.²¹ Finding it suitably inspiring, Lister relays how ‘they sung another like verse’ and ‘the enemy fled into the houses’.²² Captain John Hodgson entered into his diary how Cromwell had shouted the very same verse at the start of the Battle of Dunbar (3 September 1650), and had sung the 117 Psalm after his victory there.²³ Psalm 68 proved so effective that the younger son of Viscount Saye and

¹⁸ For example, when Sir Philip Sidney’s father, Sir Henry Sidney, lord president of the Marches, made a notable visit to the town of Shrewsbury in 1581, 360 boys from the local school ‘marched bravely’, ‘in battel order with their generalls, captens, droomes, trumpettes and ensings’, declaring in their orations ‘howe valiantly they would feight and defende the countrey’. Five years later, the scholars ‘made a triumphe’ in the town fields, ‘against the popes army and other rebells whom they triumphantly vanquished’; returning through the town with drums and trumpets, bonfires, and ‘thankfull psalmes most joyfully soonge to God’ (qtd. in Patrick Collinson, ‘The Shearmen’s Tree and the Preacher: The Strange Death of Merry England in Shrewsbury and Beyond’, in *The Reformation in English Towns*, ed. by Collinson and Craig, pp. 205-220 (pp. 212)).

¹⁹ Richard Bernard, *The Bible-Battells. Or the Sacred Art Military. For the Rightly Wageing of Warre According to Holy Writ* (London: 1629), p. 211. Bernard was a popular religious writer. He was cited for nonconformity during the 1630s and died shortly before the Civil War broke out.

²⁰ It should be noted that historically ‘prayers’ on the battlefield were also seen as the ‘*Guns and instruments of Warre*’ by Christian leaders such as King David, Marcus Aurelius, Luther and others. Cf., Simeon Ashe, *The best refuge for the most oppressed* (London: 1642), A3v.

²¹ Joseph Lister, *The Autobiography of Joseph Lister*, ed. by Thomas Wright (London: 1842), p. 76.

²² Lister, *Autobiography*, ed. by Wright, p. 76. Psalm 68 didn’t just scare the Royalists. Edmund Calamy preached that ‘Athanasius tells us that Anthony the Monk fought against the Divell with that Text, Psalm. 68.1’ because the ‘Divell is more afraid of this Text, then any other’ (Edmund Calamy, *Englands looking-glasse presented in a sermon* (London: 1642), pp. 9-10).

²³ Hodgson, *Autobiography*, ed. by Turner, p. 148. Also see Cromwell, *Letters*, ed. by Carlyle and Lomas, I, p. 311. It was only during the Commonwealth that Royalist poets like Henry Vaughan would use Psalm 68 as an invective against Cromwell’s regime. His ‘A Prayer in time of persecution and Heresie’ included these lines ‘*Arise O God, and let thine enemies be scattered, and let those that hate thee flee before thee*’ (Henry Vaughan, ‘*The Mount of Olives* (1654)’, in *The Works of Henry Vaughan* (Second Edition), ed. by L. C. Martin (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1957), pp. 137-210 (p. 166)).

Sele, Captain John Fiennes, had it used as the motto for his battle standard.²⁴ This was also possibly sung by Ralph Josselin, a clergyman based in Earls Colne, Essex, who records in his diary how in June 1645 he ‘sung Psalmes, prayd and spake’ together with soldiers at their headquarters in the town of Saffron Walden.²⁵ As a motto or song, the prevalence of Psalm 68.1 amongst parliamentary soldiers may have been inspired by Thomas Case’s fast sermon based on this biblical text, entitled *Gods Rising, his Enemies Scattering*, delivered before the Commons in October 1642 and printed two years later.²⁶

Recording psalms as parliamentary battle songs also extended to print. It was John Vicars who observed in his published account of the war *Englands Parliamentary Chronicle* (1646) how at the Battle of Winceby (11 October 1643) the ‘men went on in several bodies, singing Psalms’.²⁷ Less than a year later, during the decisive siege of York (22 April–1 July 1644), Simeon Ashe, chaplain to the Earl of Manchester, confirmed the use of such praise by the Army in his newsbook *A Continuation of True Intelligence*. Ashe keenly related how the Royalist commander Lord Grandeson caned a soldier for informing him that ‘while the Canon was playing on both sides’ the ‘Round-heads were singing Psalms’ and thus were sure to win the battle by divine providence.²⁸ As it turned out, the poor infantryman was right, as Ashe gleefully added that the now victorious besiegers, as if to pour salt in the wound, did ‘sing Psalms’ to celebrate their victory.²⁹ The reason for Ashe’s report was clear: ‘Let this evermore be our discriminating character, to difference us from our enemies, That it is our constant practise to sing forth the praises of our God... both for safety and successe’.³⁰ Considering the potentially wide readership of Vicars’ chronicle and Ashe’s newsbook, their representations, whether true or not, almost certainly boosted morale amongst parliamentarians whilst encouraging psalm singing on the battlefield as a sure guarantor of victory.³¹ This demonstrates a robust literary culture that wanted the parliamentary

²⁴ Ian Gentles, ‘The Iconography of Revolution: England 1642–49’, in *Soldiers, Writers and Statesmen of the English Revolution*, ed. by Ian Gentles, John Morrill, and Blair Worden (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), pp. 91–113 (pp. 102–104).

²⁵ Josselin, *Diary*, ed. by Macfarlane, p. 26.

²⁶ Thomas Case, *Gods rising, his enemies scattering* (London: 1644).

²⁷ John Vicars, *Magnalia Dei Anglicana. Or, Englands Parliamentary chronicle* (London: 1646), p. 45.

²⁸ Simeon Ashe, *A Continuation of True Intelligence*, 10-27/07/44 (London: 1644), p. 3.

²⁹ Ashe, *A Continuation of True Intelligence*, 10-27/07/44, p. 3.

³⁰ Ashe, *A Continuation of True Intelligence*, 10-27/07/44, p. 3.

³¹ Several copies of Ashe’s account were printed in 1644 which only attests to the popular readership of parliamentary newsbooks. Vicars’ chronicle was a compendium of three prior accounts written by him. These were *Jehovah-Jireh, or, God in the Mount* (parts 1 and 2, 1644), *Gods Arke over-Topping the*

army to be remembered, like the Huguenot armies during the French Wars of Religion, 1562–1598, as having ‘marched into battle singing psalms’.³²

St Nicholas’ account, as we shall see, was also tied to the wider psalm culture practised by parliamentarians during the war. Articles of devotion, and the singing of psalms in particular, was very much on the minds of Parliament in the year that St Nicholas was listening to and citing psalms. After the 3 August 1643 every soldier under Parliament was issued with the much abridged *The Souldiers Pocket Bible*, edited by Edmund Calamy, a noted godly minister of St. Mary, Aldermanbury, which contained numerous psalm passages.³³ Its edict that, ‘*A Souldier must crie unto God in his heart in the very instant of the battell*’ was clearly being followed in the battlefield psalm singing shown above.³⁴ As a text, *The Souldiers Pocket Bible* was to counter the *Soldiers Prayer Book* (1642). This was a manual of prayers based upon the BCP and copies of it were carried by the King’s army.³⁵ Furthermore, on 20 November 1643 the Assembly of Divines had been asked to consider the merits of a new metrical psalter for use in church worship as part of the Assembly’s wider inquiries into religious reformation.³⁶

Psalms were also enmeshed as part of Parliament’s mottos on battle standards and they were sung at Thanksgiving Days, military funerals and the taking of the

Waves (1646), and *The Burning-Bush not Consumed* (1646). For the popularity of such pamphlets amongst parliamentarian readers see Jason Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers: Propaganda during the English Civil Wars and Interregnum* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 163–202.

³² Francis Higman, ‘Music’, in *The Reformation World*, ed. by Andrew Pettegree (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 491–504 (p. 499); Hugh Dunthorne, *Britain and the Dutch Revolt 1560–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), pp. 85–86. This is not to say that all soldiers fighting for Parliament were enthusiastic psalm singers (some sectaries within the army were vehemently opposed to it). Cf., Thomas Edwards, *The Third Part of Gangraena* (London: 1646), p. 252; Josselin, *Diary*, ed. by Macfarlane, p. 62, p. 76. Apart from those who volunteered, parliamentarian foot-soldiers, just like Royalist ones, were also often conscripts drawn from the ranks of prisoners of war. This ensured, as Barbara Donagan has argued, that ‘Parliamentarians and royalists alike plundered, sacked and killed against orders and conventions, and fled, deserted and changed sides. Even the New Model army retained old characteristics, and its supporters continued to distinguish between godly officers and soldiers and the unregenerate mass’ (Barbara Donagan, ‘Codes and Conduct in the English Civil War’, *Past & Present*, 118 (February 1988), pp. 65–95 (p. 92)).

³³ Kingston, *The Great Civil War*, p. 126.

³⁴ Anon, *The Souldiers Pocket Bible* (London: 1643), p. 6.

³⁵ Daniel Swift, ‘The Book of Common Prayer’, in *The Oxford Handbook of English Prose 1500–1640*, ed. by Andrew Hadfield (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), pp. 576–591 (p. 582).

³⁶ Cf., William Arthur Shaw, *A History of the English Church During the Civil Wars and Under the Commonwealth, 1640–1660*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1900), I, pp. 377–384. Parliament had been busy too with the demolition of the Cheapside Cross (2 May 1643) and the burning of the Book of Sports (10 May 1643) (Gardner, *History*, I, p. 154). St Nicholas commented on the destruction of the Cheapside Cross in his later poem entitled ‘Upon my first Observation of the Pulling Down of the Great Cross in Cheapside near Peter’s Wood Street, and Paul’s Cross’ (1644), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 36.

Solemn League and Covenant during this period.³⁷ On the days set apart by Parliament for Thanksgiving Day sermons the presiding minister was to read the ‘*Order and Narrative [of the battle] in their said Congregations, immediately after the Psalm before the Sermon, for the better stirring up of the hearts of the People to praise God for the same*’.³⁸ Thus, psalm singing for battles recently won appeared entirely orthodox to those worshippers who supported Parliament.

Cromwell and his men clearly took a great interest in not just singing but writing and reading psalms. Thomas Fairfax wrote a metrical version of almost all of them in manuscript and he encouraged his men to sing them after battle.³⁹ It has been argued that Milton’s translation from the Hebrew of Psalms 80 to 88 was intended for use at the famous prayer meeting of the army at Windsor in the summer of 1648.⁴⁰ Cromwell himself, prior to storming Basing House (14 October 1645) spent an agonising night meditating on Psalm 115.⁴¹ After the victory at the Battle of Preston (17–19 of August 1648) he used Psalms 17 and 105 to justify his triumph.⁴² That this psalm culture was politically significant is evidenced in how it came under attack in the writings of those loyal to the King.⁴³ It was only after the regicide of Charles I that Royalist writers used

³⁷ Cf., Willson H. Coates, Vernon F. Snow, and Anne Steele Young, eds., *The Private Journals of the Long Parliament*, 3 vols (New Haven; London: Yale UP, 1982–87), I, p. 411, II, p. 104; John Frederick Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament: Puritanism During the English Civil Wars, 1640–1648* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015), p. 52, p. 78; Gentles, ‘Iconography’, in *Soldiers, Writers and Statesmen*, ed. by Gentles, Morrill, and Worden, pp. 102–104.

³⁸ England and Wales, Parliament, *An order of Parliament, for a thanks-giving together with a declaration of the grounds and reasons of it* (London: 1650). This practice was undoubtedly much earlier than this, for it was remarked upon by a Royalist newsbook as early as 1643. Cf., Heylyn, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 10-16/09/43 (Oxford: 1643), pp. 505–506. Church attendants were advised of these battle relations ahead of time as the directions for the reading of battle narratives were also published in advance in newsbooks loyal to Parliament’s cause. For public thanksgivings for, and published narratives of, victories as a common practice of Parliament see Catharine Macaulay, *The History of England: From the Accession of James I to the Elevation of the House of Hanover*, 5 vols (London: 1769), V, p. 64, p. 117, p. 410, p. 417.

³⁹ Henry Cotton, *A List of Editions of the Bible and Parts Thereof in English, from 1505 to 1820* (1852), p. xviii.

⁴⁰ Margaret Boddy, ‘Milton’s Translation of Psalms 80–88’, *Modern Philology*, 64.1 (1966), pp. 1–9 (p. 3).

⁴¹ John Morrill, ‘How Oliver Cromwell Thought’, in *Liberty, Authority, Formality: Political Ideas and Culture, 1600–1900. Essays in Honour of Colin Davis*, ed. by John Morrow and Jonathan Scott (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2008), pp. 89–112 (p. 98).

⁴² Cromwell, *Letters*, ed. by Carlyle and Lomas, I, p. 269.

⁴³ Cf., Henry Slingsby, *Original Memoirs, Written During the Great Civil War; Being the Life of Sir Henry Slingsby*, ed. by Walter Scott (Edinburgh: 1806), p. 50; Prince Rupert, *Memoirs*, ed. by Warburton, II, p. 132, p. 353; Heylyn, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 3-9/09/43 (Oxford: 1643), p. 501. This is not to argue that Royalist soldiers were bereft of piety. As Margaret Griffin reveals, strict regulations were drawn up for the King’s Army whereby commanders were to ensure that ‘Sermons and Prayers [were] duly frequented by their several companies’ (Griffin, *Regulating Religion and Morality in the King’s Armies*, p. 102). Griffin also argues that Royalist soldiers heard and sang psalms as part of their services, but not when they marched into battle (Griffin, *Regulating Religion and Morality in the King’s Armies*, xi). Just like

the psalms as part of their exilic literature.⁴⁴ St Nicholas' remarks in *For My Son* will now be read within this psalm culture inside parliamentarianism.

Psalm 142.7: 'Bring my soule out of prison, that I may praise'

The concluding section of St Nicholas' prison verse epistle *For My Son* is made up of a series of intertwined psalms. The first of these introduces the link between the psalm singing of imprisoned parliamentarians and those sung by imprisoned Apostles:

And yet next morn to hear these caged birds sing,
To hear what peals of psalms they forth did ring,
To see their spirits not yet by these brought under,
Made their poor friends rejoyce, their foes to wonder;
Would make a neuter in the cause believe
These men have somewhat whereupon to live,
Somewhat within when all without is gone,
The cause they fought for sure is right or none.⁴⁵

This image was a deliberately multi-layered one. Symbolically the 'caged birds' stood for the allegorical figure of *amor humanus* (or the sinful body as a 'cage') that trapped the *anima* (or the divine soul as a 'bird') which yearned for release. Biblically it recalled, and wittily reversed, the psalmist's expression of spiritual imprisonment:

(Psalm 142.7) Bring my soule out of prison, that I may praise thy Name

There was a double irony here. St Nicholas represents captive men whose souls were liberated though their bodies were incarcerated; who did not lament their captivity but whose songs celebrated their cause as one of religious freedom.

the parliamentarian army, however, Royalist soldiers were a mix of conscripts and volunteers, whose religious beliefs and devotional practices varied greatly.

⁴⁴ For example, Henry King, bishop of Chichester, repeatedly amended the text of the Psalms in 1651 'to soften the royal psalmist's notes of criticism of kings' (Derek Hirst, 'The Politics of Literature in the English Republic', *The Seventeenth Century*, 5.2 (1990), pp. 133-155 (p. 150).

⁴⁵ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 541-548, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 26.

The meaning of these prison ‘peals of psalms’ are further elucidated by their connection to another passage of scripture. St Nicholas was invoking the psalm singing of Paul and Silas in their prison in Philippi:

(Acts 16.25-26) And at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doores were opened, and euery ones bands were loosed.

Early modern readers were frequently called upon to make the typological link between these two biblical passages. One of Francis Quarles’ *Emblemes* (1635) on Psalm 142.7 included an engraving by William Simpson of a bird released from its cage (Figure 5).⁴⁶ The emblem ended with an epigram on Acts 16.25-26 that read:

Pauls Midnight voice prevail’d; his musicks thunder
Unhing’d the prison doores; split bolts in sunder:⁴⁷

On the one hand, St Nicholas was relying on a generally accepted reading amongst English Protestants of these two scriptural passages. Suffering Christians were both inwardly contrite supplicants to God (the psalmist’s plea for spiritual deliverance in Psalm 142) and outwardly active agents for God (Paul and Silas’ resignation to and acceptance of physical persecution in Acts 16), all of which were expressed through the medium of the psalms.⁴⁸ These readings were also present in the work of another

⁴⁶ It should be noted that, though Quarles’ emblems were first published in 1635, all quotations and images used in this thesis are taken from the 1696 edition. This is because this edition provides the clearest woodcut illustrations of Quarles’ emblems, and so for consistency is used throughout.

⁴⁷ Francis Quarles, *Emblemes* (London: 1696), p. 286.

⁴⁸ For the popular usage of suffering prisoners as ‘caged birds’ see James Shirley, *The bird in a cage: A comedie* (London: 1633), F4r; Alexander Brome’s ‘Birds in a cage [who] may freely sing’ (in his poem ‘The Royalist Written in 1646’, in *Poetry and Revolution*, ed. by Davidson, p. 422); and Vavasor Powell’s printed verse collection entitled *The Bird in the Cage* (1661). Avian metaphors were politicised for the soldiery class during the 1640s. Fighting Royalists were figured as ‘rooks’ and Roundhead combatants as ‘jackdaws’ (Katharine Gillespie, *Women Writing the English Republic, 1625–1681* (Cambridge UP, 2017), pp. 181–183). These labels may have occurred earlier. Anne Southwell, in her manuscript verse, wrote of malign counsellors to the King during the 1620s as ‘I cannott chuse but smile to see these bladders/grow only bigg wth a pestiferous wind,/like naked Jackdawes tumbling from theyr ladders’ (Jean Klene, ed., *The Southwell-Sibthorpe Commonplace Book: Folger Ms V.b.198* (Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), p. 136). If ‘jackdawes’ proverbially signified Parliament, then Southwell’s reference to them reflected her loyalist allegiances.

religious poet – William Vaughan. In his grand historical poem *The Church Militant* (1640) Vaughan argued that one of the hallmarks of the early defenders of English Protestantism was that they sang psalms during times of persecution. Vaughan (like John Foxe before him) linked psalm singing to the persecuted followers of medieval dissenters like John Wycliffe – and even further back to the oppressions of the early Roman Christian converts – where:

They, as did *Saints* befit,
Assembled in the Night, [and] sung *Psalmes*.⁴⁹

To Vaughan, just as to St Nicholas, Christian tradition showed that psalm singing expressed resistance to persecution.

On the other hand, St Nicholas' image of the 'peals of psalms' by 'caged birds' was not just a religiously but politically provocative one. Such acts were tied to a conception of English parliamentarianism, not just Protestantism, during times of persecution. Psalm singing was not just a personal act of obedience to God, but a display of open resistance to tyrannical oppression. This is why several parliamentarian authors invoked the same scriptural precedents in their writings. Milton referred to both Acts 16 and Psalm 142 in his *Animadversions* (1642). He described those past and present reformers who through 'opening the prisons and dungeons [had] cal'd out of darknesse and bonds', whereby their psalm songs identified them as 'the elect Martyrs and witnesses of their Redeemer'.⁵⁰ Henry Burton in his prison memoir *A narration of the life of Mr. Henry Burton* (1643) listed thirteen ways his carceral sufferings paralleled those of the imprisoned Apostle Paul. The last of these were based on Acts 16.25-26:

As God indued *Paul* with an excellent spirit to undergoe and overcome all his affliction with a singular alacrity and constancy, so as he sung Psalmes in the prison... so the same God poured into my soule abundantly the like spirit, of fortitude and magnanimity, not only

⁴⁹ William Vaughan, *The Church militant historically continued from the yeare of our Saviours Incarnation 33. untill this present* (London: 1640), p. 248. For Vaughan's strong Calvinism see Ceri Davies, 'Vaughan, Sir William (c.1575–1641)', *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, January 2008.

⁵⁰ John Milton, *Animadversions* (London: 1642), p. 39.

cheerfully and constantly, but even triumphantly, to be more then conqueror in all my sufferings.⁵¹

As Simeon Ashe stated in his fast sermon *The Best Refuge For The Most Oppressed* (1642), prisoners of the Royalists had nothing to fear for ‘you have the blessed Apostle *Paul* for a glorious pattern’ to follow in his prison praise. Francis Thorne in his sermon before the Commons, entitled *The Soules Solace in Times of Trouble* (1643), also advised those captured during the fighting, who he addressed proverbially, ‘Let Paul and Silas consider for whose sake they are imprisoned, and they will sing and rejoyce in the midst of their sufferings’.⁵² These writings reveal how scriptural scenes of prison psalms were used to encourage and justify the prison praise of parliamentarians.



Figure 5. William Simpson’s engraving representing ‘Psalm 142.7’ in Francis Quarles’ *Emblemes* (London: 1696), p. 284. An edition of this work was published in 1643, the same year St Nicholas wrote his prison verse epistle *For My Son*.

⁵¹ Burton, *Life*, p. 36. Quoting St Paul’s liberation from imprisonment was also popular amongst sectaries during the 1640s. Variations included that by the Baptist Henry Adis who wrote how the ‘Great Creator... Who canst unlock the prisons, and canst see/The many poor oppressed, subjects [set] free’ (Henry Adis, *A spie, sent out of the Tower-chamber in the fleet* (London: 1648), p. B3r). The autobiography of the parliamentary general Sir William Waller was arranged around Pauline themes. One of these, in echoing 2 Corinthians 12:3-10, stated, ‘I may say, with the Apostle, glorying, as he did, of the things which concern mine infirmities. I have been IN PRISONS FREQUENT’ (Waller, ‘Recollections’, p. 104).

⁵² Simeon Ashe, *The best refuge for the most oppressed* (London: 1642), p. 13; Francis Thorne, *The soules solace in times of trouble* (London: 1643), A2v-B1r.

This literary culture demonstrates how St Nicholas' observation of his fellow prisoners' 'peals of psalms' was both scripturally and politically aligned with parliamentarianism. He showed that if Roundhead prisoners could sing sacred songs when 'all without is gone' (just as Burton, Wycliffe, Paul and Silas had done before them), then 'friends', 'foes' and even a 'neuter in the cause' may have proof enough to believe that the 'cause they fought for sure is right'.

Psalm 51: 'A Psalm of Mercy'

Such a notion was a highly contentious one. It was anathema to Royalist poets who derided the claim that psalm singing vindicated Parliament's cause and behaviour. Royalist writers were not against psalm singing altogether. The singing of psalms was a longstanding Church of England practice.⁵³ Moreover, psalms were frequently quoted and sung by Charles I and those closest to him.⁵⁴ Some were even sung by Royalists during battles – but not on the battlefield.⁵⁵ What Royalists objected to, then, was the use of psalm singing outside the context of church services. In this way those loyal to the King sought to demonstrate that psalm singing on the battlefield, or anywhere other than in churches and chapels, was not a mark of Parliament's religious righteousness (or political justness) in fighting against their monarch – but rather a sign of their treason, heresy and criminality.

In the same year as *For My Son*, Abraham Cowley, in his printed satire *The Puritan and the Papist* (1643), derided the kind of psalm-singing soldiers St Nicholas was depicting:

Your madnesse makes you *sing*, as much as they
Dance, who are bit with a *Tarantula*.
 But do not to your selves (alas) appeare

⁵³ Willis, *Church Music and Protestantism*, pp. 83-132.

⁵⁴ Cf., Achsah Guibbory, 'Anglicans and Royalists at War and in Exile', in *Christian Identity, Jews, and Israel in 17th-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), pp. 121-159; Wilcher, *The Writing of Royalism*, pp. 277-286; Paul Gameson, 'Introduction', in *William Lawes (1602–45), 12 Psalms 'To Comon Tunes'*, ed. by Paul Gameson (York: York Early Music Press, 2002), pp. ii-xii (p. xii).

⁵⁵ To counter those psalms sung by the besieging men of Thomas Fairfax, the beleaguered Royalists during the Battle of York (1644) also sang psalms. As one account relayed 1,000 of the King's men 'sang a psalme, together with the quire and organ' in the minster to drown out the noise of cannon fire (qtd. in Marsh, *Music and Society*, p. 450). Marsh records only one other instance of Royalist psalm singing, and again this takes place within a church to the sound of an organ (p. 450).

The most *Religious Traitors* that ere were,
 Because your Troopes *singing* of *Psalmes* do goe;
 There's many a Traytor has marcht *Holbourn* so.⁵⁶

Cowley was making a wry connection between parliamentary psalm singing and the *miserere* or 'Psalm of Mercy' (Psalm 51) often sung by criminals at the gallows. This was to indicate that their 'Troopes *singing*' would be no different from that sung when they were defeated and 'marcht [to] *Holbourn* so' – that their psalms did not absolve them from being (but rather marked them out as) 'Traytor[s]'. A poem attributed to John Cleveland, 'The General Eclipse', written after the execution of Charles I, reverses this image whilst retaining the same anti-parliamentarian and anti-psalm singing sentiment. It apostrophises the King's killers as,

Criminal Valors! who commit
 Your Gallantry, whose *Pæan* brings
 A Psalm of Mercy after it;⁵⁷

This time the 'Psalm of Mercy' was being used to figure Roundheads not as executed criminals but as criminal executioners. The accusation is that they can 'Gallant[ly]' sing '*Pæan[s]*' in praise to their heavenly king, whilst 'Criminal[ly]' killing their earthly one, all without even changing their chant. St Nicholas was evidently aware of this kind of gallows-humour that was being used to scorn parliamentary psalm singing. He turns such arguments on their head to show what happens when the King's soldiers get an opportunity to execute a psalm-singing 'Traytor'.

When captured after the siege of Rotherham in May 1643, St Nicholas relates in *For My Son* how he was sent for by the 'earl's [of Newcastle's] commissioners' to pay 'fifty pounds' for the compounding of his property.⁵⁸ He explains that because he was

⁵⁶ Abraham Cowley, *The Puritan and the Papist by a Scholler in Oxford* (Oxford: 1643), p. 5. This was part of the oft-enacted gallows humour of Royalist poets. For the refrain of '*to th' Gallows he must go*' directed towards parliamentary writers see Martin Parker, 'Upon [the] Defacing of White-hall', in *Poetry and Revolution*, ed. by Davidson, p. 321.

⁵⁷ John Cleveland, 'The General Eclipse', in *The Poems of John Cleveland*, ed. by Brian Morris and Eleanor Withington (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967), pp. 69-70 (p. 69).

⁵⁸ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 189, 193, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 19.

‘stripped of all’ by the plundering Royalists he was unable to ‘pay that sum’.⁵⁹ The commissioners refused to believe him and castigated him:

With ‘rascal’, ‘traitor’, and with threats to hang me.⁶⁰

St Nicholas responds by comparing this potential injustice at the gallows to the tradition of the ‘Psalm of Mercy’ or the so called ‘neck-verse’ of Psalm 51. The ‘neck-verse’ or ‘asking the book’ ensured that first time convicted felons could be reprieved from being tried for certain capital crimes in a secular court. All they had to do was plead ‘benefit of the clergy’ by proving that they could read the first line of Psalm 51. This was a convention that clearly favoured the learned and prejudiced the illiterate.⁶¹

Turning their ‘threats to hang’ him against them, St Nicholas explains that hanging him because of a fine that they have made him unable to pay would be like:

To bore out a man’s eyes, and then for nought
But for not reading [the ‘Psalm of Mercy’] t’hang him was, methought,
Hard justice;⁶²

Like Shakespeare’s Jack Cade in *Henry the Sixth* (1591), St Nicholas uses Psalm 51 to speak to the abuses of monarchs and their minions to convict, punish and kill innocent men at the gallows.⁶³ St Nicholas was also making a point about the King’s army and their skewed sense of justice. Though the Earl of Newcastle’s ‘commissioners’ were offering St Nicholas a release from his imprisonment, it was the looting of St Nicholas’ home by the Earl’s soldiers that prevented him from meeting the conditions of that release. This injustice was akin, as St Nicholas’ argued, to allowing a convicted felon to go free providing they could read Psalm 51 – but not before they had their eyes ‘bore[d] out’. There was an added irony to St Nicholas’ remark, in that the reading of this gallows psalm, in hopes of a reprieve, privileged literacy; whereas the psalm itself

⁵⁹ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 185, 196, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 19.

⁶⁰ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), line 192, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 19.

⁶¹ This convention was extended to women in 1692. It was abolished in 1827. Cf., Duncan Salkeld, ‘Crime’, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. by Andrew Hadfield, Matthew Dimmock, Abigail Shinn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 193-206 (p. 197).

⁶² St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 197-199, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 19.

⁶³ William Shakespeare, *Henry the Sixth* (Part II), in *The RSC Shakespeare: Complete Works*, ed. by Bate and Rasmussen, IV.7.30-31. For its later use by parliamentary writers see John Trapp, *A commentary or exposition upon the four Evangelists, and the Acts of the Apostles* (London: 1647), p. 109.

emphasized, as Alison Knight has recently argued, ‘the brokenness of human utterance’.⁶⁴ St Nicholas called such treatment ‘Hard justice’:

but it seems so did not they.

They bid the marshal straight: ‘Take him away!’⁶⁵

His instincts over the Royalist vitriol towards psalm-singing, coupled with their proclivity for gallows humour, were not only precedented but prescient. In May 1644, the parliamentarian Captain George Sharples was captured and lodged in the Oxford gaol. He was taken out into the yard and made by one guard to kneel in the mud. In a mock execution scene, he was given a psalter and asked to sing – most likely the ‘Psalm of Mercy’.⁶⁶ ‘Hard justice’ indeed! St Nicholas’ remarks on the misuse of Psalm 51 may have also been a pointed reference to its use on a Royalist battle standard. Beneath a picture of a loaded cannon and a hand issuing from a cloud holding a linstock and a lighted match, one Royalist flag contained a quotation from Psalm 51.15: ‘Open thou my lips and my mouth shall show forth [thy praise]’.⁶⁷ As Ian Gentles has argued, this was the ‘only satirical quotation from the Bible’ to have appeared on a battle standard of

⁶⁴ Alison Knight, “‘This verse marks that’: George Herbert’s and Scripture in Context”, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c. 1530–1700*, ed. by Killeen, Smith and Willie, pp. 518–532 (p. 526).

⁶⁵ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 199–200, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 19.

⁶⁶ Carlton, *Going To The Wars*, pp. 244–245. Wallington remarks that when the Royalists took Bristol in the spring of 1643 ‘certain fiddlers’ sang ‘blasphemous songs not fit to be mentioned’, calling them the ‘4th and 12th Psalms’, standing in the streets and ‘praying in a mocking manner’, saying, ‘Lord, Thou wast with us at *Edgehill* and *Brainford*; but where wast Thou at *Runaway Hill*? and where art Thou now, O Lord?’, speaking ‘through their noses, and looking up to heaven’ (Nehemiah Wallington, *Historical Notices of Events Occurring Chiefly in the Reign of Charles I*, 2 vols (London: 1869), I, p. 186). However, Royalist captives were also mocked, albeit for a different kind of singing. William Waller records an instance when amongst the prisoners taken of Henry Percy’s, Baron Percy of Alnwick, retinue in the winter of 1645 there ‘was a youth of so faire a countenance, that he [Cromwell] doubted of his condition; and to confirm himself willed him to sing; which he did with such a daintiness that Cromwell scrupled not to say to Lord Piercy; that being a warriour, he did wisely to be accompanied by *Amazons*; on which that Lord, in some confusion, did acknowledg that she was a damsel; this afterwards gave cause for scoffe att the King’s party, as that they were loose and wanton, and minded their pleasure, more than either their Country’s service, or their Maister’s good’ (William Waller, ‘Recollections [of Sir William Waller]’, in *The Poetry of Anna Matilda*, ed. by Hannah Cowley (London: 1788), pp. 97–139 (pp. 125–126)).

⁶⁷ Gentles, ‘Iconography’, in *Soldiers, Writers and Statesmen*, ed. by Gentles, Morrill, and Worden, pp. 101–102. The Biblicism of the Roundhead army was also illustrated in that they had the phrase ‘Holiness to the Lord’ (taken from Exodus 28.36) written upon ‘the very Bridles of their Horses’, whilst the Royalist soldiers wore miniatures of Charles I ‘round their necks’ (Anon, *The rise and growth of fanaticism: or, a view of the principles, plots, and pernicious practices of the dissenters, for upwards of 150 years* (London: 1716), p. 32, p. 38).

the Civil War, and that this was a direct ‘repudiation of [the] roundheads’ fondness for quoting scripture on their flags, especially from the Book of Psalms.⁶⁸

St Nicholas’ representation of the ‘caged birds [who] sing’ (Psalm 142) and his critique of the use (and misuse) of the gallows psalm (Psalm 51) provide an intriguing proposition. There is no evidence that the inmates he describes sang their psalms by reading from a psalter, just as there is no evidence to suggest that those psalms sung on the battlefield by their comrades were. If these psalms were learnt off by heart, as English Protestants were often urged to do as part of their domestic worship,⁶⁹ then many of these same soldiers could have easily passed (through mnemonic not literate skill) the ‘neck-verse’ test at the gallows – because they could sing psalm praise wherever they went. St Nicholas was making a vital point about the educational value, and not just the political or religious value, that the psalm culture within the parliamentary army embodied.⁷⁰

This was a potent point. It was not so much the reading (literacy) but the singing (memory) of psalms that defined soldiers fighting for Parliament as God’s

⁶⁸ Gentles, ‘Iconography’, in *Soldiers, Writers and Statesmen*, ed. by Gentles, Morrill, and Worden, p. 101. There was, however, some ambiguity surrounding the interpretation of some parliamentary banners, mottos and colours. As Johanna Harris points out, the flag that flew at Brampton Bryan Castle, when Brilliana Harley was defending it during a siege by Royalist forces during the summer of 1643, contained an emblem that featured a ‘hand reaching out of a cloud, holding a sword’. This appeared to replicate a royalist banner with the instruction, ‘Rex et Regina beati, sibi, suisque’, which translated as, ‘King and Queen, blessed to themselves, and to their followers’ (Johanna Harris, “‘Scruples and ceremonies’: Lady Brilliana Harley’s epistolary combat”, *Parergon: Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 29.2 (2012), pp. 93-112 (pp. 105-106)).

⁶⁹ For the duty of men to lead their households as ‘little churches’, see Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 443-481. Several godly men recorded the singing of psalms (often metrical) as part of their domestic devotions. Cf., Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, pp. 4-5. Yet this was not the sole preserve of Calvinistic parliamentarians. Sir Robert Cecil, Lady Danvers, Lady Falkland and George Herbert all sang psalms within their homes. Cf., Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), p. 107; Green, *Print and Protestantism*, p. 511. Psalm singing, however, was not endemic to domestic piety during the 1640s. Several gentlewomen, such as Hester Pulter, Anne Sadleir, and Dorothy Packington, preserved the Established Church liturgy (with its psalm readings) in their homes and protected deprived Royalist clergy (Ann Hughes, ‘Society and the Roles of Women’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Literature and the English Revolution*, ed. by Laura Lunger Knoppers (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), pp. 155-170 (p. 161)).

⁷⁰ Far more people could read than write during this period. Cressy observes that more than two thirds of the men and nine tenths of the women were so illiterate at the time of the Civil War that ‘they could not even write their own names’ (Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, p. 2). Despite one newsbook’s claim in 1647 that men were ‘barely [able] to read their Psalter’, clearly many parliamentary soldiers had memorised some of the psalms (William Ley, *Mercurius Anti-Pragmaticus*, 28/10-4/11/47 (London: 1647), p. 8). However, as Margaret Spufford cautions, when it came to ‘reading ability’ during this period, ‘different levels of fluency and skills are involved, but there is no way of distinguishing them’ (Margaret Spufford, ‘First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Spiritual Autobiographers’, *Social History*, 4.3 (October 1979), pp. 407-435 (p. 410)).

army.⁷¹ This was to challenge Cowley's and Cleveland's derision of the 'Troopes *singing of Psalmes*'. To them it was blind fanaticism not Biblicism (the 'madnesse makes you *sing*' such 'Criminal Valors') that characterised their enemy as traitors. To St Nicholas, it was precisely the opposite. It was their singing of biblical songs (those 'peals of psalms') committed to heart and sung *en masse*, that parliamentarians could point to as the 'cause they fought for sure is right'. St Nicholas' implication was that those who obsessed, criticised and ridiculed psalm-singing were the true fanatics, '*Religious Traitors*' of the Word of God – and England's real enemy. Just as Richard Baxter had observed that if a man 'sing a Psalm, they [Royalists] presently cried out, *Rebels, Round-heads*'; St Nicholas was attempting to show how psalm-singing soldiers were axiomatic of this 'new-stamped treason callèd roundheadism'.⁷² This chimed with Civil War accounts in the press that identified psalm singing (besides praying and fasting) as one of the primary causes of Parliament's victories on the battlefield.⁷³

In his exculpatory use of Psalm 51, St Nicholas sought to defend the Army's psalm singing and attack the Royalist criticisms of this practice. By doing so, St Nicholas showed these acts of praise as being closely tied to the Army's sense of itself as a vessel of divine judgement, righteousness and conquest. His psalmic expressions were no mere velleities but real calls for, as they were responses to, political action against the King.

⁷¹ Nehemiah Wallington recorded that those who billeted Royalists 'dare not perform any act of religion, neither to give thanks at meals, nor yet to pray, read, or sing Psalms'; but instead those soldiers 'fill their houses with swearing and cursings' (Wallington, *Historical Notices*, I, p. 185). This was as true for Welsh as it was for English soldiers fighting for Parliament. Morgan Llwyd, a Welsh clergyman who travelled with the Army across England in 1643, wrote that much to the chagrin of his countrymen the Royalists had suppressed psalm singing, 'Instead of the singing of Psalms... is the sound of our enemies troubling our heart with their vain, proud, hellish words' (Morgan Llwyd, 'Cwynfan, Cyssur, Cryfder y Ffyddloniaid Ynghymru Ynghanol y Rhyfeloedd [The Desolation, Lamentation, and Resolution of the Welsh Saints in the Late Wars. Sung in 1643]', in *Poetry and Revolution*, ed. by Davidson, p. 420).

⁷² Baxter, *Reliquiae*, ed. by Sylvester, p. 44; St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), line 210, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 19. For similar passages that are almost exact copies of Baxter's remarks, quoted by other Calvinist ministers, see Martindale, *Life*, ed. by Parkinson, p. 41; Calamy, *Nonconformists Memorial*, ed. by Palmer, I, p. 11.

⁷³ For the effectiveness of fast sermons to the war effort, Aubrey commented 'that some did observe in the late civil war that the Parliament, after a humiliation, did shortly obtain a victory' (John Aubrey, *Miscellanies Upon Various Subjects* (London: 1890), p. 163). For the success of prayers to military engagements, John Warren argued in his sermon to Parliament on 14 April 1649, 'Let your prayers march with the Armies... Oh let not those *hands* now fall, which have with such success been *lifted up*' (John Warren, *The Potent Potter* (London: 1649), p. 23).

Psalm 137.1-4: ‘By the rivers of Babylon’

Having effectively flagged the importance of psalm singing as an identifying trait of – and effective act of resistance by – parliamentary soldiers, St Nicholas then cites particular psalms that speak to the fight against the King. These are prompted by the ‘news [that] comes’ of a series of devastating defeats by the Royalists:

this captain’s slain and tother –
Our friends have lost the field, were fain retreat –
Bradford’s the next design – Bradford’s beset –
Bradford is in great straits – poor Bradford’s taken,
Their powder first all spent – Leeds is forsaken,⁷⁴

These gloomy reports culminate in the news that there was ‘no colour for resistance left’ and that ‘now all/Our forces scattered are’.⁷⁵

In response St Nicholas drew a parallel between the plight of the defeated parliamentary captives and those of the Jewish captives in Babylon:

Now must my muse sit down and like the dove
Mourn and breathe sighs to him that is above,
And in sad silence trickle tears amain
Till God shall smile upon us once again.⁷⁶

This closely followed a passage in the Psalms which related Israel’s lament for their defeat and capture:

(Psalm 137.1-2, 4) By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof... How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?

⁷⁴ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 550-554, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 26-27.

⁷⁵ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 555, 558, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 27.

⁷⁶ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 569-572, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 27.

St Nicholas included all the characteristic elements of this psalm passage: its speaker a captive, sitting, weeping and unable to sing a song.⁷⁷ The real moat at Pontefract Castle might have also reinforced to St Nicholas the appropriateness of Psalm 137's imagery – a captive who 'sat' and 'wept'; which he paraphrases as 'sit[s]' and 'tears' – near a body of water.⁷⁸

The ambivalent gender of his tear 'trickl[ing]' muse also provided added layers of scriptural meaning. For towards the middle of the seventeenth century outbursts of sobbing were not considered a solely feminine quality – even Cromwell cried in public.⁷⁹ St Nicholas' depiction of dejection was in keeping with the biblical personification of Jerusalem in the figure of the Widow of Lamentations. She is described as one who 'weepeth sore... she sigheth' (Lamentations 1.2, 8) and describes herself as, 'I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water... for my sighs are many' (Lamentations 1.16, 22). Her grieved laments were for 'my young men [who] are gone into captivity' *à propos* the exiled Jews in Babylon (Lamentations 1.18). This passage's verbal and thematic parallels to Psalm 137 were often reinforced in Renaissance emblems like those of Francis Quarles (Figure 6). Thus, St Nicholas' evocation of the Widow of Lamentations can be seen as deliberate.⁸⁰

It is easy to see why St Nicholas chose Psalm 137 to express his prison lament. As Hamlin has shown, it was 'the quintessential psalm of the Renaissance and Reformation'.⁸¹ Its broad appeal was encapsulated in its universal themes of

⁷⁷ St Nicholas' dense Biblicism means that his rueful muse also encompassed other scriptural mourners. This included King Hezekiah who, before hearing Isaiah's prophecy of his people's future captivity in Babylon, shed 'tears' and 'did mourn as a dove' for the state of his nation (Isaiah 38.5, 14). A versification of Hezekiah's song in Isaiah 38.9-20, (where the phrase 'mourn as a dove' appears), was also penned by a Scottish Presbyterian poet and printed just one year after St Nicholas wrote *For My Son*. Cf., Zacharie Boyd, *The garden of Zion* (Glasgow: 1644), pp. 247-248.

⁷⁸ For the structural layout of Pontefract Castle during the Civil War, see Edward King, *Observations on Ancient Castles* (London: 1782), p. 36. There was a deep-rooted irony in Royalist poets' interpretation and application of Psalm 137.1-4. Court poets like Francis Davison, Thomas Carew, George Sandys and Henry King all depicted the despondent Israelites in their paraphrases as having 'unstrung harps' (and thus 'unsung songs') near the Euphrates riverbank. However, the posture of these poets, some of whom invoked Psalm 137 in their exilic literature, did not embrace stoical images like St Nicholas' 'sad silence', but rather elegiac singing. The little ditty of one loyalist verse pamphlet was typical of their rueful melodies, 'For Songs of Joy, we Sorrow sing;/Our joyfull notes are changed quite./And mournfull tunes we Sing each night' (S. H., *This last ages looking-glasse: or Englands sad elligie* (London: 1642), B4r).
⁷⁹ Bernard Capp, 'Jesus Wept, but did the Englishman?', *Past & Present*, 224.1 (August 2014), pp. 75-108.

⁸⁰ The fact that he, in another of his manuscript prison poems, describes his muse using the female pronouns of 'her' and 'she' would make such a reading even more apposite (Thomas St Nicholas, 'Upon the Sight of My Bedfellow in Pontefract Castle' (1643), lines 19, 21, 23, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 35).

⁸¹ Hamlin, *Psalm Culture*, p. 219.

persecution, loss, alienation, exile and revenge. Its scenes were even painted on the walls of some godly households.⁸² Most importantly, Psalm 137 resonated with those who fought against Charles I.⁸³



Figure 6. Engraving representing the sorrowful figure of ‘Psalm 137.4’ in Francis Quarles’ *Emblemes* (London: 1696), p. 244. As Hamlin points out about this scene, here Quarles’ figure of Psalm 137 is a female ‘pilgrim and a pris’ner too’ who mourns from ‘hell-black dungeons’, just as the Widow of Lamentations cries ‘out of the low dungeon’ (Lamentations 3.55).⁸⁴ St Nicholas’ muse, who laments the prison conditions of parliamentary soldiers, was clearly influenced by such representations. While Quarles’ figure ‘cannot speak for sobs, nor sing for tears’, St Nicholas’ muse sits in ‘sad silence’ trickling ‘tears amain’.⁸⁵ While Quarles’ figure has ‘Grown hoarse with

⁸² Hugh Adlington, David Griffith, and Tara Hamling, ‘Beyond the Page: Quarles’s *Emblemes*, Wall-Paintings, and Godly Interiors in Seventeenth-Century York’, *HLQ*, 78.3 (Autumn 2015), pp. 521-551 (p. 536).

⁸³ Even before the conflict, those poets like John Saltmarsh (future chaplain to Sir Thomas Fairfax and the parliamentary army), and George Wither (future soldier under the Earl of Essex whose collections of psalms were to be considered by the Long Parliament for a new national psalter) saw Psalm 137 as legitimising the Lower House’s social and religious reforms. Cf., John Saltmarsh, *Poemata sacra* (London: 1636), p. 1, p. 2; George Wither, *The Psalmes of David* (London: 1632), pp. 271-272. For their respective parliamentarianism see Roger Pooley, ‘Saltmarsh, John (d. 1647)’, *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, January 2004; Michelle O’Callaghan, ‘Wither, George (1588–1667)’, *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, September 2004.

⁸⁴ Hamlin, *Psalm Culture*, pp. 224-225.

⁸⁵ Quarles, *Emblemes*, p. 246; St Nicholas, *For My Son*, line 571, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 27.

begging alms, to warble notes', St Nicholas' muse describes an image of famished soldiers that would 'make a dumb man mournful ditties warble'.⁸⁶

The lament over Babylonian captivity in Psalm 137 was often cited by those who preached the monthly fast sermons before Parliament.⁸⁷ This made it familiar to parliamentarians like St Nicholas, as many of these sermons were subsequently printed.⁸⁸ The very first of these, preached by Cornelius Burges, set the tone by calling for, 'the final subversion and ruin of Babylon and of that whole monarchy'.⁸⁹ Speaking of the Laudian imprisonments during the 1630s, Jeremiah Burroughs stated in *Sions joy* (1641), 'yea God seemed to drive us out to darkness, our harps were hanged upon the willows, some of our complaints were, *how can we sing one of the Lord's songs in a strange land?* for thither we were driven, not taken captive by our open enemies, but driven by our false friends and brethren'.⁹⁰ He warned that unless action was taken soon, history might repeat itself. As conflict with the King appeared inevitable, more parliamentary preachers drew on Psalm 137 as a rallying cry for fasting and prayer. Thomas Wilson's *David's Zeale to Zion* (1641) instructed members that concerning the

⁸⁶ Quarles, *Emblemes*, p. 246; St Nicholas, *For My Son*, line 540, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 26.

⁸⁷ Fast sermons were, albeit begrudgingly, made official by Charles I in his proclamation of the 8 January 1642. These were national public fasts for the last Wednesday of each month. These continued until the dissolution of the Rump of the Long Parliament in 1653. Christopher Hill, however, saw the weekly lectures in parishes, authorised by Parliament in September 1641, as the most effective 'recruiting agents' for the parliamentary cause. He quoted Charles I's tirade at their preachers as the 'Furious promoters of the most dangerous innovations... [to] stir up and continue the rebellion raised against me' (qtd. in Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution 1603–1714* (New York: Norton, 1980), p. 161, p. 162). For lengthy discussions on fast sermons, see Ann Hughes, 'Preachers and Hearers in Revolutionary London: Contextualising Parliamentary Fast Sermons', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 24 (2014), pp. 57–77; Hill, *The English Bible*, pp. 79–108; Hugh Redwald Trevor-Roper, 'Fast Sermons of the Long Parliament', in *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change and Other Essays*, ed. by Hugh Redwald Trevor-Roper (London: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 85–138; Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament*, passim.

⁸⁸ Fast sermons were a part of the 488 sermons preached for days of humiliation and thanksgiving between 1640–1653 (Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament*, pp. 148–149). Though we must heed Arnold Hunt's warning that printed and preached sermons were by no means identical. Cf., Hunt, *The Art of Hearing*, pp. 148–149, p. 153, p. 156. Despite the emendation of printed sermons, scholars such as Carlson attest to their inherent 'trustworthiness' and reliability as 'sources for actual religious practice' (E. J. Carlson, 'English Funeral Sermons as Sources: The Example of Female Piety in Pre-1640 Sermons', *Albion*, 32 (2000), pp. 567–597 (p. 582, p. 591).

⁸⁹ Cornelius Burges, *The First Sermon* (London: 1641), p. 14.

⁹⁰ Jeremiah Burroughs, *Sions joy* (London: 1641), p. 3, also see p. 7, p. 14. As he continued his speech, Burroughs became more rousing, equating parliamentarianism with martyrdom. In evoking the final words of the Marian martyr Hugh Latimer to Nicholas Ridley, Burroughs suggested that the ultimate sacrifice be required to defend the parliamentary cause, 'let Zion come into our minds... be of good courage and *let us play the men* for our people, and for the City of our God, and the Lord doe that which seemeth him good' (p. 3). Latimer's words to Ridley were, 'Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out' (Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 1770). Both Latimer's and Burroughs' exclamations were taken from 2 Samuel 10.12: 'Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the Cities of our God'.

nation's present troubles, 'Godly men to remember Zion, [had] wept for its sad condition, *Psal. 137. 1*'.⁹¹

It soon became commonplace in fast sermons to equate monarchical tyranny with that inflicted on the Jews during their captivity in Babylon.⁹² William Bridge, in his sermon to the Lower House entitled *Babylons Downfall* (1641) saw England's present situation and that expressed in Psalm 137 as 'two Babylons paralleld'.⁹³ Taking his inspiration from the gloss on Psalm 137 in the Geneva Bible, Bridge assured his audience that their cause was just because, 'if the extirpation of Babylon, with the reformation of true Religion, were not a hard work, it were not fit for a Parliament to doe'.⁹⁴ Edmund Calamy admonished M.P.s in *Gods Free Mercy to England* (1642) that if 'God had promised to deliver Israel out of Babylon' then it followed that 'God intends to shew mercy to England', but only if they like the Israelites in Psalm 137 were made to 'pray, and mourne, and weepe' for the collective sins of the nation.⁹⁵

Some of the fast sermon preachers, much like St Nicholas, equated the plight of parliamentary prisoners with that faced by the Jewish captives in Psalm 137. Walter Bridges, in *Joabs Counsell and King Davids Seasonable Hearing It* (1643) compared the 'sighing prisoners' in Babylon to the 'mourning captives' held by the Royalists in 'this dolefull spectacle of warre'.⁹⁶ Francis Cheynell's sermon, *Sions Memento, and Gods Alarum* (1643), which appeared in print just a month after St Nicholas had been captured at Rotherham, bears some striking resemblance to the imprisoned poet's rueful rendering of Psalm 137. Cheynell compared the plight of those fighting for Parliament to,

⁹¹ Thomas Wilson, *Davids zeale for Zion* (London: 1641), p. 41, p. 45, italics my emphasis. St Nicholas may well have read this printed sermon or known of its author. In 1642 Wilson was appointed from St Nicholas' home county of Kent to be a representative to the Westminster Assembly of divines as well as town lecturer in Maidstone. Cf., Jacqueline Eales, 'Wilson, Thomas (c.1601–1653)', *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, September 2004.

⁹² For the justification of Parliament's war against the King as one actually against his evil counsellors see Prescott, 'A Year in the Life of King Saul: 1643', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c. 1530–1700*, ed. by Killeen, Smith and Willie, p. 420.

⁹³ William Bridge, *Babylons downfall a sermon lately preached at Westminster before sundry of the honourable House of Commons* (London: 1641), p. 6.

⁹⁴ Bridge, *Babylons downfall*, p. 10. The Geneva Bible gloss to Psalm 137 was, 'The people of God in their banishment seeing God's true Religion decay, lived in great anguish and sorrow of heart'. All subsequent quotations from the Geneva Bible are taken from *The Geneva Bible, a Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

⁹⁵ Edmund Calamy, *Gods free mercy to England* (London: 1642), p. 38.

⁹⁶ Walter Bridges, *Joabs counsell and King Davids seasonable hearing it* (London: 1643), p. 3.

When the poor Jews were prisoners in Babylon, by the rivers of Babylon there they sat down and wept, and wept amain, when they remembred Zion, *Psal. 137. 1*. Oh for Jeremies tears, and Jeremies spirit, that we might write another book of Lamentations, to bewail the miserable security of this present age! Sion sits down by the rivers of Babylon, the waters of strife, and rivers of Confusion, and shall there be no fountain in our Head, or Heart; no penitent streams flowing from our eyes? The God of heaven make this marble sweat, that we may not keep a Mock-fast to day, with dry eyes and hard hearts.⁹⁷

Cheynell's description of the Israelite captives who 'wept amain', echoes St Nicholas' one of his muse trickling 'tears amain'. The connection appears more marked because neither the Authorized, Geneva nor any other verse psalters at that time inserted the word 'amain' into their translation of Psalm 137. Cheynell calls for the heart's 'marble [to] sweat' so that 'penitent streams [were] flowing from our eyes' – as opposed to 'dry eyes and hard hearts' – when considering the victims of war. This matches St Nicholas' own expressions concerning the horrors of the conflict in *For My Son*:

To think of suchlike objects of the ears
And eyes would wring out floods of brinish tears,
From driest eyes, would melt an heart of marble,⁹⁸

Such similarities reveal how authors were using a shared biblical frame of reference when discussing the parliamentary cause and the soldiers who fought for it.

St Nicholas wasn't just influenced by – and seeking to align himself with – fast sermons preached before the Commons. Psalm 137 was also used by verse psalters of the Civil War to speak to the army's hardships. Written in the same year as *For My Son*, Francis Rous in his *The Psalms of David* (1643), paraphrased the opening of Psalm 137 as,

⁹⁷ Francis Cheynell, *Sions memento, and Gods alarum* (London: 1643), p. 2.

⁹⁸ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 537-539, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 26.

When *captives* we at Babylon did by the rivers sit,
 We thought on Sion, yea we wept when we remembred it.
 We hang'd our Harps and Instruments the Willow trees upon:
 And, *being full of grieve*, delight in musick we had none.⁹⁹

By his additions of 'captives' in the first verse, and 'being full of grief' in the second (neither of which appears in the Authorized or Geneva versions of Psalm 137) one can see how Rous' descriptions evoked the plight of parliamentary prisoners like St Nicholas.¹⁰⁰ As its title page made clear, Rous' *Psalmes* were adopted by Parliament 'for the general use' of the public. They were printed on 17 April 1643, more than a month before St Nicholas was imprisoned in Pontefract Castle, so it is not unlikely that he had read them.

By casting himself, and his fellow inmates, as the woeful and weeping Jewish captives of Psalm 137, St Nicholas was engaging with a prominent visual topos associated with (as it was espoused by) the parliamentary cause. St Nicholas was clearly tapping into the literature of fast sermons and psalms dedicated to Parliament before and during the early years of fighting. He did so to reinforce the way this psalm was a symbol of both persecution and longing for liberation for those who subscribed to the parliamentary cause.

Psalm 77.8: 'Is his mercy clean gone for ever?'

St Nicholas then turns from lamenting the poor state of the parliamentary army to making an ardent supplication to save it. Through internal monologue, he asks of God whether,

⁹⁹ Francis Rous, *The Psalms of David set forth in English meeter set forth by Francis Rous* (London: 1643), p. 291. Rous' *Psalmes* were immensely popular. His first edition was considered by Parliament to be incorporated into a new national psalter during the Civil War. The third edition, printed in 1673, was, after emendation, approved as the sole version to be sung in churches and chapels in England and Wales. It remained the established version of the psalter in the Scottish Church. Cf., Norton, *Bible as Literature*, I, p. 121.

¹⁰⁰ The second edition of Rous' *Psalmes* stuck much more closely to the King James Version whose Psalm passages were placed parallel to Rous' translation in this edition. As Rous stated in his Preface, 'few places have been altered [from the King James], except where some very probable cause hath appeared' (Francis Rous, *The Psalms of King David in English Metre* (London: 1646), A3v). Rous' reversion to a translation that stuck more closely to the King James Bible may have been from government pressure to produce a more standardised psalter that was likely to be more widely accepted.

His mercy [is] gone for ever, or [is] his arm
Shortened that cure it cannot all this harm?¹⁰¹

St Nicholas' marginalia cites this first line as a paraphrase of 'Ps. 77.8', the second as one of 'Isa. 50.2'. Taken together these scriptures reveal his poetic gloss as a dialogue between suppliant and saviour. Where the former indicates David's plea in time of distress,

(Psalm 77.8) Is his mercy clean gone for ever?

The latter is God's declaration to the prophet Isaiah that,

(Isaiah 50.2) Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I
no power to deliver?

St Nicholas' hermeneutics here are subtle. What initially appears as an introspective doubting of deliverance, is revealed to be more than a silent prayer – for it is a human query which receives a divine reply – a question that is followed by a positive affirmation. St Nicholas' scriptural reading also allows him to use this same rhetorical device twice. Via *hypophora* – where the 'speaker makes answer unto his own demand' (OED) – St Nicholas' cry for help implies a favourable reply.¹⁰² He does this by choosing to replace the word 'hand' (from Isaiah 50.2) with the word 'arm' (from Psalm 77.15). This anticipates God's gracious deliverance (from the earlier pleas of Psalm 77.8) with that described in Psalm 77.15 which, in the Authorized Version follows,

Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people,

Moreover, as often with St Nicholas, his political allegiance to Parliament is indicated by this choice of phrasing. The substitution of 'arm' rather than 'hand' was one influenced by verse paraphrases of this psalm written by supporters of Parliament. Rous' *Psalmes* (1643), which were being considered by the Assembly of Divines for a

¹⁰¹ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 575-576, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 26.

¹⁰² l.a., 'hy'pophora, n.', *OED*, online edn, 2016.

new national psalter (and whose version St Nicholas may have read) translates Psalm 77.15 as,

Thy people from captivity, thy mighty *arme* did free,¹⁰³

William Barton's *The Book of Psalms in Metre* (1644), which Parliament and the Assembly were also considering adopting as a new psalter, rendered this verse as,

Thy stretcht-out *arm* redeem'd thine own¹⁰⁴

Zacharie Boyd, who was a consultant and go-between on the Scottish side, for the Assembly's deliberations over the creation of 'One Psalm-book in the three Kingdomes', wrote in his own *The Psalms of David in Meeter* (1646), that this verse should be read as,

Thy people thou hast with thine *arme*
redeemed, as we see,¹⁰⁵

By contrast, Royalist renderings of Psalm 77.15 replaced the word 'arm' with varied alternatives. George Sandys, in *A Paraphrase upon the Divine Poems* (1638), interpreted it as:

Who wonders can effect alone,¹⁰⁶

Vaughan and Taylor in their respective *The Psalter of David* (1644, 1647), wrote it as,

Thou hast mightily delivered thy people,¹⁰⁷

The bishop of Chichester Henry King in *The Psalmes of David* (1651) translated it as,

¹⁰³ Rous, *Psalms*, p. 151, italics my emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ William Barton, *The Book of Psalms in metre* (London: 1644), p. 153, italics my emphasis.

¹⁰⁵ Zacharie Boyd, *The Psalms of David in Meeter* (Glasgow: 1646), p. 116, italics my emphasis. For Boyd's part in the national psalter see Robert Baillie, *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, ed. by David Laing, 3 vols (Edinburgh: 1841-2), III, p. 543.

¹⁰⁶ George Sandys, *A paraphrase upon the divine poems. By George Sandys* (London: 1638), p. 95.

¹⁰⁷ Vaughan, *Psalter*, p. 191; Taylor, *Psalter*, p. 144.

Thou with that high victorious hand,¹⁰⁸

St Nicholas further demarcated his parliamentarianism via other psalm paraphrases. Further down his prison verse epistle he evokes Psalm 77.9 to reflect upon the dire state of the Army:

Doth not he see that now our strength is gone,
That now to help shut up, or left, there's none?¹⁰⁹

Though he cites these lines in the margins as belonging to those of '*Deut. 32.36*', they also bear a striking resemblance to Psalm 77.9,

Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?

This verse was a politically charged one. It was employed by poets like Zacharie Boyd in his sacred history *The Garden of Zion* (1644).¹¹⁰ Here Boyd used Psalm 77.9 to describe the sins of King Jeroboam who was directly responsible for Israel's captivity in Babylon:

He did ill Kings in wickednesse follow:
This Jeroboam[,] Jeroboams sin
[...]
For at this time none was shut up or left,
Poor Israel of all help was bereft.¹¹¹

Psalm 77.9 not only linked St Nicholas' earlier use of Psalm 137 to figure Israel's captivity in Babylon as comparable to that of parliamentarian prisoners, but continued the trend of anti-monarchism in his verse. As Christopher Hill points out, such

¹⁰⁸ Henry King, *The Psalmes of David* (London: 1651), p. 140.

¹⁰⁹ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 587-588, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 27.

¹¹⁰ This was premised upon Francis Quarles' earlier sacred histories written during the 1620s. For a discussion of this see Robert Wilcher, 'Lucy Hutchinson and Genesis: Paraphrase, Epic, Romance', *English: Journal of the English Association*, 59 (2010), pp. 25-42.

¹¹¹ Boyd, *Garden of Zion*, p. 363.

associations were indictments of royal tyranny. Charles I was often figured as England's Jeroboam in Civil War sermons and pamphlets, the errant king who brought in new religious ceremonies and plunged his country into war. Indeed, such was the biblical typology that *The Souldiers Pocket Bible* (1643) listed several scriptures concerning this irreligious King of Israel.¹¹² This was to demonstrate why in order 'to prevent this sin' of monarchal oppression, God had 'beene accustomed to give the victory to a few' – a victory hoped for by soldiers like St Nicholas.¹¹³

St Nicholas' marginal citation of Deuteronomy 32.36 was also indicative of his parliamentarianism. In *The Souldiers Pocket Bible* this verse, taken from the Geneva Bible, appeared under the heading, '*And let Souldiers, and all of us know, that the very nicke of time that God hath promised us helpe, is when we see no helpe in man*'.¹¹⁴ Several fast sermons of the 1640s show that this scripture was very popular for describing the assurance of God's deliverance in battle.¹¹⁵ As Simeon Ashe stated in his sermon *A Support for the Sinking Heart in Times of Distresse* (1642) – he was to preach before Parliament five times between 1641–1653 – Deuteronomy 32.36 indicated that, 'When in this distresse they cry out as persons in an undone condition, then, though not till then will he deliver'.¹¹⁶

St Nicholas' pointed use of Deuteronomy 32.36 and Psalm 77.8-9, 15 was an attempt not just to ally himself with the parliamentarian cause but to indicate his willingness to patiently endure the suffering that came with it. His biblical marginalia and paraphrasing were meant to chime with those idioms couched within a parliamentarian print culture of sermons, psalters and sacred verse histories. These expressed confidence that a final victory, despite all signs to the contrary, was ultimately assured.

¹¹² These were: 2 Chronicles 13.3, 4, 8, 13, 15. Cf., Anon, *The Souldiers Pocket Bible*, pp. 11-12.

¹¹³ Anon, *The Souldiers Pocket Bible*, p. 10.

¹¹⁴ Anon, *The Souldiers Pocket Bible*, p. 13. In the Geneva Bible, the passage for Deuteronomy 32.36 read, 'For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent toward his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and none shut up in hold nor left abroad'.

¹¹⁵ Cf., Calamy, *Gods free mercy*, p. 9; Thomas Case, *Gods waiting to be gracious unto His people* (London: 1642), p. 16; Thomas Temple, *Christ's government in and over his people* (London: 1642), p. 50.

¹¹⁶ Simeon Ashe, *A support for the sinking heart in times of distresse* (London: 1642), p. 4.

Psalm 44.11: ‘sheep appointed for meat... scattered’

Using scripture, St Nicholas then moves from demonstrating that heavenly intervention is possible, to why it is needed. He does this by returning to the defeated state of the Army. He had noted earlier in *For My Son* how Parliament had suffered several recent defeats in the summer of 1643 in that ‘Bradford’s taken’ and ‘Leeds forsaken’.¹¹⁷ He responded by supplicating God to

Put life, make armies of these scattered ones¹¹⁸

St Nicholas cites this verse in the margins as coming from ‘*Jer. 31.10*’. This passage identifies ‘scattered Israel’ as sheep who will eventually be gathered by God ‘as a shepherd doth his flock’.¹¹⁹ However, the reference to a persecuted people as ‘sheep scattered’, was commonplace in the Bible.¹²⁰ As such, St Nicholas’ use of this phrase was not confined to Jeremiah 31.10 alone. As was so often the case with him, it was just as important to allude to an implicit scriptural notion that could be associated with his parliamentarianism, as referencing an explicit scripture for it.

We can see this in how parliamentarian writers often used the apophthegm of the Roundheads as scriptural ‘sheep scattered’ during the early 1640s. In arguing for the ‘Accommodation’, a proposal that gave Parliament command of the militia and the London Trained Bands, Edward Bowles posited in 1643 that failure to do so would keep their men like ‘sheepe scattered, a fit prey for the *Wolves* of these times’ (a paraphrase of John 10.12).¹²¹ Zacharie Boyd in *The sword of the Lord* (1643) quoted a similar verse by stating that soldiers must be careful not to ‘provoke *GOD* by our sinnes’, for it

¹¹⁷ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 553-554, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 26-27.

¹¹⁸ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), line 584, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 27.

¹¹⁹ This verse read: ‘Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock’. Such marginalia was as indicative as it was deliberate. It followed parliamentarian tracts written that year that used Jeremiah 31.10 as a prayer, ‘*He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd doth his flocke: All they that devoure thee shall be devoured, and all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall goe into captivity... Amen*’ (Anon, *A dialogue argving the Parliaments lawfull resistance of the powers now in armes against them* (London: 1643), p. 60).

¹²⁰ Cf., 1 Kings 22.17; 2 Chronicles 18.6; Isaiah 13.14; Ezekiel 34.5-6, 21; Zachariah 13.7; Jeremiah 23.1-2; Matthew 26.31; Mark 14.27. Other biblical verses are referenced throughout this chapter.

¹²¹ Edward Bowles, *Plaine English, or, A discourse concerning the accommodation, [and] the armie* (London: 1643), p. 28.

they did ‘we shall in the day of Battell flee like *sheepe scattered on the mountaines*’ (a paraphrase of 2 Chronicles 18.16).¹²²

Yet St Nicholas’ ‘scattered ones’ had a double meaning. It stood for parliamentarianism not just as a political movement, but as a religious one. John Ley lamented the present upheavals by the King’s men, which had ensured that by ‘Civill Warre they see great Congregations are dissolved, the Shepheards and their flocks seperated, the Sheepe scattered, if not both he, and they butchered’.¹²³ The Welsh independent minister Morgan Llwyd in his song ‘The Desolation, Lamentation, and Resolution of the Welsh Saints’ (1643) sang of his dispersed countrymen as ‘The sheep are astray, in sadness and mourning, some rot in prison; some have left, taking a long farewell, some cower in secret’.¹²⁴ This image of God’s saints as ‘scattered ones’ was a particularly redolent one amongst the later radical elements of the New Model Army. The Ranter Joseph Salmon in *A Rout, A Rout* (1649) called for power to be shared with the ‘saints scattered’ (those common soldiers) amongst Cromwell’s men.¹²⁵

The popularity of this image of ‘scattered sheep’, an image cherished by parliamentarian writers like St Nicholas, was ridiculed in Royalist writings. A broadside entitled *Heraclitus Dream* (1642) depicted a woodlands scene (Figure 7) by the engraver William Marshall who famously later designed the frontispiece to King Charles’ *Eikon basilike* (1649). At its centre, Marshall’s detailed woodcut saw dejected shepherds set upon by their sheep. This was contrasted at the sides of the broadside with other lambs looking pensively on at salivating predators in the distance.

This demonstrated the anxiety (and perceived anarchy) over Parliament’s religious reformation in ejecting many hundreds of parish clergymen as ‘malignant’ or ‘scandalous’.¹²⁶ To many loyalists these acts had involuntarily bereft parishioners of

¹²² Zacharie Boyd, *The sword of the Lord and of Gideon to this is subjoined a prayer for an armie going to battell* (Glasgow: 1643), pp. 160-161. Boyd tellingly dedicated this work, a treatise on the importance of prayer and praise in securing a military victory, to Alexander Leslie, the first earl of Leven. Leven was a popular and veteran soldier. As Lord General of the Scottish forces he fought with the parliamentarian army against Charles I during the 1640s. For his life see David Stevenson, ‘Leslie, Alexander, first earl of Leven (c. 1580–1661)’, *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, September 2004.

¹²³ John Ley, *The (a) fury of warre, and (b) folly of sinne* (London: 1643), p. 10.

¹²⁴ Morgan Llwyd, ‘Cwynfan, Cyssur, Cryfder y Ffyddloniaid Ynghymru Ynghanol y Rhyfeloedd [The Desolation, Lamentation, and Resolution of the Welsh Saints in the Late Wars. Sung in 1643]’, in *Poetry and Revolution*, ed. by Davidson, p. 419.

¹²⁵ Joseph Salmon, *A Rout, A Rout* (London: 1649), A3r.

¹²⁶ Cf., Ian Green, ‘The Persecution of “Scandalous” and “Malignant” Parish Clergy during the English Civil War’, *English Historical Review*, 94 (July 1979), pp. 507-531. For the content of Royalist propaganda more generally see Jason McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship in Revolutionary England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2007), pp. 14-33.

their ministers, or had allowed sectaries to arbitrarily reject and eject them. The depiction of supporters of Parliament as ‘scattered sheep’, regardless of whether they were hapless victims of or active agents in the ‘scattering’, was reinforced by a piece of scripture emerging from a ray of sunlight at the top of Marshall’s broadside – ‘smite ye shepherd[,] the flocke shall be scattered’ (a direct quotation from Zachariah 13.7). To drive its message home, a poem, that explicated the woodcut above it, described the chaos as,

evil eyes which we do see
Set on our Flocks, to drive them quite away,
Or to make them and us a common prey
To... wilde beasts of the Wood.¹²⁷

This doggerel concluded with a stern warning from God to religious reformers which repeated the one above it from Zachariah 13.7, ‘If you will smite these, I’ll scatter you’.¹²⁸ Not just religiously, but militarily Royalist writers derided the blind obedience of the ‘sheep-faced soldiery’ of their enemy.¹²⁹ In 1648 the clandestine Royalist newsbook *Mercurius Pragmaticus* even satirised the wages of a parliamentarian ‘Lieutenant and Coronet’ to be the market price of chattels such as ‘Calf or Sheep’.¹³⁰ The image of parliamentarians as ‘sheep scattered’ was so poignant it persisted long into the Restoration.¹³¹

¹²⁷ William Marshall, *Heraclitus dream* (London: 1642), broadside.

¹²⁸ Marshall, *Heraclitus dream*, broadside.

¹²⁹ Samuel Sheppard, *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 9-16/05/1648 (London: 1648), G3r.

¹³⁰ Sheppard, *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 9-16/05/1648 (London: 1648), G3r. There may have been some truth to these claims. As Andrew Hopper argues, though it has long been recognized that Parliament enjoyed a critical advantage in the funding and supply of its armies, as the war raged on, financing became riven by ‘factional and political infighting’. This meant that pay rates differed according to locality and the Generalty of a particular regiment (Andrew Hopper, ‘The Armies’, in *English Revolution*, ed. by Braddick, pp. 260-271 (pp. 265-268)).

¹³¹ One example is John Nalson’s frontispiece to *A True copy of the journal of the high court of justice for the tryall of King Charles I* (London: 1684), broadside. Though this was published some thirty-five years after the event, Nalson played upon the visual topos of the ‘scattered sheep’. In the foreground Cromwell was riding an infernal chariot, figured with the legs of a wolf to evoke the biblical warning to beware of false prophets who come ‘in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves’ (Matthew 7.15). In the background are some lambs, the ‘Fond flocks [who] regain their defiant liberty’, but now that their ‘slain shepherd’ in Charles I is dead, they are running away prey to ‘Wolves devouring Jaws’. The sheep flee from a ruined mansion which stands for the Church of England. Such representations were reinforced by Charles I’s prayer from 1 Chronicles 21.17, ‘Let thy anger I beseech thee be against me and my Fathers house, as for these Sheep what have they done’ (Charles I, *Eikon Basilike* (London: 1649), p. 112). Milton took issue with such representations. In his *Eikonoklastes* (1649) he attacked Charles I’s defence of bishops. Milton averred, ‘Those Clergimen were not *to be driv’n into the fold like Sheep*, as



Figure 7. An engraving in William Marshall's broadside *Heraclitus dream* (London: 1642). The image in the centre, marked 'A', is explicated as 'The *Ram*, *Ewe*, and *Lamb* butting him, shew that some of all sorts, men, women, and children, are ready to abuse Ministers. The Instruments *Pastoral* lying broken and scattered, sheweth, his Ministry rejected'.

Considering the above, St Nicholas' use of the 'scattered ones' had political and religious resonance in parliamentary writings. This was no more so in that it invoked Psalm 44.11:

Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat; and hast scattered us among the heathen.

his [Charles'] Simily runs, but to be driv'n out of the Fold like Wolves, or Theeves, where they sat *Fleecing* those Flocks which they never fed' (John Milton, 'Eikonoklastes (1649)', in *The Complete Works of John Milton, Vol. 6: Vernacular Regicide and Republican Writings*, ed. by Neil Keeble and Nicholas McDowell, 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), VI, pp. 252-426 (p. 362)). Also see Milton's remark that, 'The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed' (John Milton, 'Lycidas', in *John Milton: The Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by John Carey (Harlow: Longman, 1971), I.125.

If this was the particular scripture he was paraphrasing, it would certainly have been appropriate. Psalm 44.11 was listed under the heading of ‘Affliction’ in contemporary Bible concordances and was seen as ‘A Prayer in time of Warre’ or ‘affliction’ in several psalm paraphrases.¹³² Psalm 44 was also commonly cited as a sign of the ‘afflicting times’ in several fast sermons before Parliament.¹³³

As with Psalm 77.15 and Psalm 137.1-4, St Nicholas was also undoubtedly influenced by the printed psalm paraphrase of Psalm 44.11 by parliamentarian authors. Francis Rous gave an extended two-line versification of it in his psalter:

Thou hast us given up like sheep for meat that slain must be:
[A]mong the Heathen far and wide we scattered are by thee.¹³⁴

This was in contrast to the rendering of Royalist poets like Robert Vaughan and Jeremy Taylor. Their prosaic psalm paraphrases printed during the Civil War were shorn of the personal despondency (not to mention the doleful lyricism) of Rous’ own interpretation. For example, Vaughan’s rendering in *The Psalter of David* (1644), which is identical to Taylor’s *Psalter of David* (1647), has it:

Thou lettest us to be eaten up like sheep: and hast scattered us among the
Heathen.¹³⁵

Curiously, Vaughan and Taylor number verse 11 as verse 12 (by separating half of Psalm 44’s verse 3 as verse 4), something that neither the Authorized nor the Geneva versions do. This oddity in Psalm 44’s sequencing was maintained by Henry Ferne, frequent preacher to Charles’ court at Oxford during the 1640s.¹³⁶ Ferne suggested in A

¹³² John Hart, *The fort-royal of the Scriptures, or, The vade-mecum concordance* (London: 1649), p. 186; Robert Vaughan, *The Psalter of David* (Oxford: 1644), p. 106; Jeremy Taylor, *The psalter of David with titles and collects* (London: 1647), C2r, p. 81; William Barton, *Psalmes*, p. 86.

¹³³ Cf., Stephen Marshall, *A peace-offering to God* (London: 1641), p. 10; Calamy, *Gods free mercy*, p. 19; Simeon Ashe, *The best refuge for the most oppressed* (London: 1642), p. 5, p. 6, p. 8, p. 39; William Sedgwick, *Zions deliverance and her friends duty* (London: 1642), p. 3, p. 35; Edward Reynolds, *Israels petition in time of trouble* (London: 1642), p. 43.

¹³⁴ Rous, *The Psalms*, p. 83.

¹³⁵ Robert Vaughan, *The Psalter of David* (Oxford: 1644), p. 106. Also see Jeremy Taylor, *The psalter of David with titles and collects* (London: 1647), C2r, p. 81.

¹³⁶ For earlier monarchical poets who followed this erroneous sequencing for Psalm 44, see Henry Ainsworth, *The booke of Psalmes, Englished both in prose and metre with annotations* (London: 1618), p. 50, p. 52. Those like George Sandys and John Davies did not provide the corresponding scriptural verse number for each line of their paraphrases. Cf., George Sandys, *A paraphrase upon the divine*

view of the Kings army, and spirituall provision made for it (1643) that Psalm 44.10-11, (whose verses were actually 9-10), be read as part of the soldiers' private devotion 'Upon ill Successe' in battle.¹³⁷ By his misnumbering and omission of verse 11 – 'Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat; and hast scattered us among the heathen' – Ferne was perhaps (deliberately or unconsciously) acknowledging its use by the parliamentary army, whose psalter poets used the same verse numbering for Psalm 44 as had appeared in the Geneva and Authorized versions.¹³⁸ Ferne indicated his political views by also choosing to use not just the same verse numbering, but an almost exact paraphrasing, of this psalm by Vaughan and Taylor (rather than those parliamentary versifications by Wither, Rous or Barton).

By contrast, *The Soldier's Pocket Bible* (1643), printed for the parliamentary army, under the heading 'For the iniquities of Gods people are delivered into the hands of their enemies', quoted a close equivalent to Psalm 44 by citing Jeremiah 50.6,

My people have been as lost sheepe, all that found them have devoured them.¹³⁹

The connection between *The Soldier's Pocket Bible's* image of the army as 'lost sheep' to St Nicholas' one of defeated soldiers as sheep 'scattered' shows just how widespread such biblical symbolism was within the parliamentary movement.

St Nicholas' use of Psalm 44.11 was not meant to be seen as negative (about the army's present defeats) but rather pre-emptive (about its future victories). Henry Ainsworth annotated the 'scattered' of Psalm 44.11 as meaning 'dispersest, strowest-abroad' as only a necessary sifting as the 'fan that winnoweth' as depicted in Jeremiah. 4.11. and 51.2.¹⁴⁰ The London preacher (and later ejected minister) Adam Martindale agreed with this reading. He noted in his diary after Cromwell's victory at Worcester (3

poems. By George Sandys (London: 1638), p. 55; John Davies, 'Psalm 44', in *The Poems of Sir John Davies*, ed. by Robert Krueger and Ruby Nemser (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975), pp. 286-287 (p. 286). The only exception is Henry King whose verse numbering of Psalm 44 matches those used in the Authorized Version. Cf., Henry King, *The Psalmes of David* (London: 1651), p. 78.

¹³⁷ Henry Ferne, *The camp at Gilgal. Or, A view of the Kings army, and spirituall provision made for it* (Oxford: 1643), p. 54.

¹³⁸ Cf., William Barton, *The Book of Psalms in metre* (London: 1644), pp. 85-86; George Wither, *The Psalmes of David translated into lyrick-verse* (London: 1632), pp. 83-85.

¹³⁹ Anon, *The Souldiers Pocket Bible* (London: 1643), p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ Henry Ainsworth, *The booke of Psalmes* (London: 1644), p. 66.

September 1651) how, ‘As a dog or storme drives sheep together, so doe afflictions God’s people’.¹⁴¹

Thus, like Martindale, St Nicholas uses Psalm 44 to justify God’s retribution towards the parliamentary army (in their early military losses) by the Almighty’s eventual intervention and providence toward them (in their later strategic gains). We can see this in his later poem ‘A Meditation on the Way towards York’ (1644) where St Nicholas recalls the dire events of the year before which showed:

our army shattered,
Our men like sheep upon the mountains scattered.¹⁴²

The ‘sheep upon the mountains scattered’ iterates as it remembers the syncopated version of ‘scattered ones’ he had written of in *For My Son* (1643). In so doing, St Nicholas makes these two images interchangeable referents to Psalm 44.11. He links the two poems lexically in order to mark the military sea change. Previously, *For My Son* had lamented the defeats by the Royalists at Bristol and Leeds, whereby St Nicholas pleaded to God,

In time, together bring these poor, dry bones,
Put life, make armies of these scattered ones.¹⁴³

Whereas his ‘Meditation’ could now rejoice over the routing of the Royalists at York,

See now dry bones revived, see now and wonder:
Those got aloft that then were all kept under.¹⁴⁴

This showed that St Nicholas’ prayer had been answered and his faith rewarded.

Such expressions were neither vain nor vaunting, boastful nor bloodthirsty. Psalm 44.11 was often part of irenic sentiments expressed by poets during moments of

¹⁴¹ Martindale, *Life*, ed. by Parkinson, p. 102.

¹⁴² St Nicholas, ‘A Meditation on the Way towards York... July 16, 1644’, lines 5-6, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 37.

¹⁴³ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 583-584, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 27.

¹⁴⁴ St Nicholas, ‘A Meditation on the Way towards York... July 16, 1644’, lines 5-6, 9-10, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 37.

national crisis.¹⁴⁵ Its use revealed St Nicholas' hope – and later realisation – that it was the Almighty who had dispersed Parliament's soldiers as 'scattered ones' in order to 'revive' them to a more perfect union, who only 'kept [them] under' so that they would better value being 'got aloft' by the God of wonders. Present afflictions did not exclude future mercies, just as present mercies did not prevent future afflictions. Therefore, St Nicholas, like Barton in his psalter's preface to Psalm 44, used it to signal the 'constancy and integritie' of God's people 'during persecution'.¹⁴⁶

Psalm 113: 'He raiseth up the poor out of the dust'

Once he had gained assurance of a future victory, St Nicholas then moved to illustrate what the socio-political effects of that victory would look like. In *For My Son* he cries out,

Who shall but God make our poor Jacob rise?¹⁴⁷

St Nicholas may have had in mind Amos 7.5 as the source text for this phrase:

Then said I, O Lord God, cease, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small.

However, this was not the only possible scriptural influence. For the analepsis of 'poor, dry bones' (mentioned three lines earlier) together with 'poor Jacob rise' can be associated with another psalm passage – that of Psalm 113.7-8. This read,

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people.

¹⁴⁵ George Wither, *The hymnes and songs of the Church* (London: 1623), p. 96; Mildmay Fane, Earl of Westmorland, *Otia sacra optima fides* (London: 1648), pp. 77-80.

¹⁴⁶ Barton, *Psalmes*, p. 86.

¹⁴⁷ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), line 586, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 27.

This psalm was often aligned with the social melting pot and upward mobility of the parliamentary army. It was a topical choice, as it often appeared in fast sermons and other pro-army treatises.¹⁴⁸ *The Souldiers Pocket Bible* framed soldiers like St Nicholas as social revolutionaries. Though it did not quote Psalm 113 directly, it used Psalm 12.4 to denote the conflict as one over economic liberation,

Now for the op[p]ression of the needy and for the sighes of the poor, I
will up saith the Lord I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at
him.¹⁴⁹

As John Angier tersely put it, when discussing an affray with Royalist troops in Lancashire, Parliament's army 'stood not to fall, but fell to rise'.¹⁵⁰ St Nicholas' phrase 'Who shall but God make our poor Jacob rise' was, therefore, both rhetorical and laden with meaning.

Psalm 113.7-8 was also integrated into the larger social levelling agenda of some parliamentary writers in their fulminations against the rich. Men like John Lilburne, Gerrard Winstanley, Stephen Marshall, John Owen, William Sedgwick and John Bunyan all insisted in their writings of the 1640s that conflict with the King had ensured that 'the high will be brought low, and the low high'.¹⁵¹ Thomas Maton used this psalm as an explanation of why journeymen, tradesmen and apprentices had come to prominence in the parliamentary cause. He stated how God had '*pulleth downe one, & setteth up another*' in using the '*weake things of this world to confound the strong*'.¹⁵² Vavasor Powell took this further during the Commonwealth. He saw Psalm 113 as legitimising the right of the lower classes to rule.¹⁵³ Its broad appeal to

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Hodges, *A glimpse of Gods glory* (London: 1642), p. 27, p. 23; Henry Jessey, *The exceeding riches of grace advanced by the spirit of grace, in an empty nothing creature, viz. Mrs. Sarah Wight lately hopeles and restles* (London: 1647), p. 111; Vavasor Powell, *Christ and Moses excellency, or Sion and Sinai's glory. Being a triplex treatise* (London: 1650), p. 356.

¹⁴⁹ Anon, *The Souldiers Pocket Bible*, p. 14.

¹⁵⁰ John Angier, *Lancashires valley of Achor, is Englands doore of hope* (London: 1643), p. 19.

¹⁵¹ See Hill, *The English Bible*, pp. 115-125. It was also cited by the middling laity not just the clergy. Godly diarists like the lawyer Robert Woodford, often cited Psalm 113.7 to pray for relief from debt, noting that God 'rayseth up the poore out of the dust & lifteth the needy out of the dunghill' (Robert Woodford, *Robert Woodford's Diary, 1637-1641*, ed. by John Fielding (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), p. 266, also see p. 365, p. 395).

¹⁵² Thomas Maton, *Israel's redemption or the propheticall history of our Saviours kingdome* (London: 1642), p. 97.

¹⁵³ Hill, *English Bible*, p. 96. In his devotional work printed for the London Trained Bands, entitled *A Salve for Every Sore* (London: 1643), Skippon tied Psalm 113.7 to other scriptural promises of economic liberation for God's people. He listed these scriptures as follows:

parliamentarians can be seen in the way Lucy Hutchinson, the wife of the regicide Colonel John Hutchinson, transcribed a translation of Psalm 113 in her commonplace book sometime during the late 1640s and early 1650s.¹⁵⁴

St Nicholas' rendering of the 'poor' who will 'rise' in Psalm 113.7 also resonated in the democratic and somewhat revolutionary slant provided by parliamentary psalters. Zacharie Boyd included this verse as an example of how God will not allow tyrants to enslave his people. Boyd's renderings came dangerously close to supporting regicide:

He raiseth up, out of the dust
the poor from the dunghill,
He lifts the begger and him sets
on Thrones with Princes still;¹⁵⁵

Similarly, William Barton translated it as:

The poor and needy he doth grace,
Whom from the dust he brings:
And dung-hill base
To Princes place,
To sit inthron'd¹⁵⁶

Francis Rous interpreted it as,

The Lord raiseth the poore out of the dust. And lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among Princes, 1. Sam. 2.7-8.
The Lord it is that giveth the power to get wealth, Deut. 8.18.
Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end shall greatly increase, Job. 8.7.
He raiseth the poore out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, Psal. 113.7 (pp. 139-140).

¹⁵⁴ Cf., Jerome De Groot, 'John Denham and Lucy Hutchinson's Commonplace Book', *The English Renaissance*, 48.1 (Winter, 2008), pp. 147-163 (p. 149). Hutchinson's choice is slightly complicated by the fact that she used a translation of Psalm 113 by the Royalist poet Thomas Carew. Although, as De Groot demonstrates, political or religious groups were not confined to reading material authored by their co-religionists or their chosen political party.

¹⁵⁵ Boyd, *The garden of Zion* (Glasgow: 1644), p. 139, also see pp. 412-414. This work was dedicated to Charles I. From his other works in print, however, it is clear that Boyd's sympathies were not always pro-Royalist (see notes 105 and 122 in this chapter). Either way, just like the poetry of Francis Quarles, Boyd clearly influenced parliamentary writers who could hijack his poetic symbolism for themselves.

¹⁵⁶ Barton, *The Book of Psalms in metre* (London: 1644), pp. 240-241.

The poor from dust to rise he makes,
 And from the dunghill up he takes
 The needy man of low degree;
 That he with Princes may him set,
 And to high place with Princes great
 Of his owne people may him raise.¹⁵⁷

This could not be more different to Thomas Carew's rendering of this psalm:

The poore from loathed
 Dust hee drawes,
 And makes them regall state invest
 Mongst kings, that gives his
 People Lawes:¹⁵⁸

Or that of George Sandys, Charles I's favourite psalter poet:

The poore he raiseth from the Dust:
 Even from the Dunghill lifts the Just;
 Whom he to height of honour brings,
 And sets him in the Thrones of Kings.¹⁵⁹

Vaughan and Taylor gave the prose rendering found in the BCP:

He taketh up the simple out of the dust: and lifteth the poor out of the mire. That he may set him with the princes: even with the princes of his people.¹⁶⁰

In the Royalist versions of Psalm 113.7-8, there is the sense that the lowly sit in the midst of Kings – 'with', 'in' or 'Mongst' – not, as in parliamentary renderings,

¹⁵⁷ Rous, *Psalms*, p. 242.

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Carew, 'Psalm 113', in *The Poems of Thomas Carew with his Masque Coelum Britannicum*, ed. by Rhodes Dunlap (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1949), pp. 142-143 (p. 143).

¹⁵⁹ George Sandys, *A paraphrase upon the divine poems. By George Sandys* (London: 1638), p. 138.

¹⁶⁰ Vaughan, *Psalter*, p. 296; Taylor, *Psalter*, p. 226.

equal to or replacements of them – ‘to high place’, ‘on Thrones’ and ‘intron’d’. This is reasserted in the way both Sandys and Carew use ‘Kings’ instead of ‘princes’ to emphasize the sovereignty and integrity of Kingship that ‘gives his/People Lawes’. Here the impoverished were empowered only so far, their ascension never superseded (as it was circumscribed by) their submission to monarchy. A Royalist paraphrase of Psalm 113 excluded plebeian interactions with monarchs altogether. The writer separated those in poverty from royalty by having God set the poor ‘his peoples Peers among’.¹⁶¹ This was reiterated in tracts that refuted claims by those like William Prynne who insisted that saints were ‘Gods Anointed as well as Kings’.¹⁶²

Further social and political distinctions can be gleaned from the polysemic ‘poor’ in this psalm. Taylor and Vaughan’s cite the destitute as encompassing the ‘simple’ (the ‘weak or feeble’ OED) who will always be economic beneficiaries (as they are political dependants) of ‘the princes of his people’.¹⁶³ It is in this vein that those like the Lord Keeper John Williams wrote to the Duke of Buckingham, more than two decades earlier, remarking of Charles I’s father (James I) as ‘that King, who hath *raised me from the dust*, to all that I am’.¹⁶⁴ It is no coincidence that these expressions were printed, along with other letters of the State, during the Protectorate to demonstrate the tyranny of monarchy.

In Rous’ verse psalter it is ‘needy man of low degree’ (‘needy’ encompassed ‘spiritual and emotional needs’ OED) who are promoted by as they are obligated to God – the poor are ‘his owne people’ not the ‘Princes great’.¹⁶⁵ Although loyalists like Taylor read ‘princes’ instead of ‘Kings’, his prayer at the end of this psalm glosses ‘Princes of thy people’ as not temporal but spiritual rulers in figures like ‘Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’. Here God’s elect were raised not socially but cosmically, ‘in[to] thine eternall Kingdome’. To followers of Charles I, the poor – like the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16.19-31) – only got their reward in heaven.¹⁶⁶ Whereas those

¹⁶¹ Anon, *The Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs of the Old and New Testament* (London: 1648), p. 70.

¹⁶² Anon, *A revindication of Psalme 105. 15. Touch not mine anointed, &c. from some false glosses, now and heretofore obruded upon it by Anabaptists proving that this divine inhibition chiefly concernes subjects: who let them be never so Gods servants, yet are they not Gods anointed as well as kings* (London: 1643); William Prynne, *A vindication of Psalme 105:15 (touch not mine anoynted and doe my prophets no harme), from some false glosses lately obruded on it by royallists, proving that this divine inhibition was given to kings* (London: 1644).

¹⁶³ 7.a., ‘simple, adj. and n.’, *OED*, online edn, 2016.

¹⁶⁴ Gabriel Bedell, *Cabala or State Letters* (London: 1654), p. 56.

¹⁶⁵ 2.a., ‘needy, adj. and n.’, *OED*, online edn, 2016.

¹⁶⁶ Vaughan, *Psalter*, p. 297; Taylor, *Psalter*, p. 227.

like William Barton followed Rous in advocating the social reformism of Psalm 113. Barton listed this psalm under the heading of the 'Poor' in his metrical paraphrase.¹⁶⁷ Roundheads like the poet Francis Thorne labelled it as one of the psalms that could be used as 'Remedies against despaire in case of want and poverty'.¹⁶⁸ To parliamentarians like St Nicholas, God raised the poor – to Royalists, it was the King who determined rank and standing.

It is understandable that Charles I may have been apprehensive about scriptures like this, touching upon the right of a people to have parity with their kings.¹⁶⁹ Ironically and inadvertently, John Donne, in a sermon preached to the young monarch at White-Hall, on the first Sunday in Lent in 1627, showed how this psalm could easily be associated with regicide. Donne exclaimed, 'For as it is God that *Raiseth up the poore out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that he may set him with Princes* [Psalm 113.7]; so it is God that *Cuts off the spirit of Princes*, and is *terrible to the Kings of the Earth* [Psalm 33.10]'.¹⁷⁰ As if to drive the point home, the printer (who published Donne's sermons posthumously after the regicide in 1649), included the biblical citations to which these phrases belonged in the margins of Donne's sermon text. On hearing this sermon, Charles I, who had only been crowned two years previously, did not challenge Donne. However, by 1648 Charles was said to be very selective about the psalms that were sung at the services he attended.¹⁷¹

Charles was not the only one to appreciate the polemical and revolutionary power of psalms as texts and songs. Francis Quarles expressed the real danger in following the logical extremes of Psalm 113's call to '*Raiseth up the poore out of the dust*':

¹⁶⁷ Barton, *Psalms*, p. 179.

¹⁶⁸ Francis Thorne, *The soules solace in times of trouble with severall particular remedies against despaire, collected out of the Psalmes of Dauid* (London: 1643), p. 102.

¹⁶⁹ Hill, *The English Bible*, pp. 217-222. Passages relating to God having 'put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree' (Luke 1.52) were used by unlettered preachers to encourage a re-enactment of such revolutionary upheavals. Cf., Bradstock, 'Digging, Levelling, and Ranting: The Bible and the Civil War Sects', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c. 1530-1700*, ed. by Killeen, Smith and Willie, p. 398.

¹⁷⁰ John Donne, *Fifty sermons. preached by that learned and reverend divine, John Donne* (London: 1649), p. 226.

¹⁷¹ It was reported that on 8 December 1648, during a service in Northumberland, Charles had received a sermon from an unnamed Presbyterian Scotsman. After the sermon the preacher 'call'd for the 52 Psalm, which begins, *Why do'st thou tyrant boast abroad, Thy wicked works to praise*', but 'His Majesty stood up, and call'd for the 56 Psalm, which begins, *Have mercy Lord on me I pray, For me would me devoure*'. Needless to say, the overwhelmingly loyal congregants 'chose to wave the Minister's psalm, and sang that which his Majesty called for' (Heylyn, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 2-8/12/48 (Oxford: 1648), p. 226). Although potentially apocryphal, such accounts demonstrate how politicised the choice of certain psalms could be.

Wee'l teach the Nobles how to crouch,
 And keep the Gentry downe;
 Good manners have an evill report,
 And turnes to pride we see,
 Wee'l therefore cry good manners down,
 And, hey! then up go we.¹⁷²

This is why several Royalist preachers were deliberately cautious about Psalm 113. It is telling that only one loyalist preacher used it in a text that was not a sermon but an instructional spiritual treatise.¹⁷³

St Nicholas' use of Psalm 113 also embodied a sense of political enfranchisement. If the author of *Eliza's Babes* (1652) was a parliamentarian, it may explain why they chose to quote Psalm 113 in their meditation entitled 'My Redemption acknowledged':

thou wilt raise me who am as one out of the dust to be one of them, that
 must declare with praise, how thou hast delivered me from the hands of
 mine enemies¹⁷⁴

The author justifies this because they 'which are redeemed by the Lord' must 'declare with praise, how he hath redeemed them from the hand of the oppressor'.¹⁷⁵ Although the writer is referring to their spiritual 'redemption' the context of this verse is imbued with political emancipation in the wake of the regicide. This is especially as the author is writing to a Commonwealth public who were well tuned to the 'liberation politics' of such scriptures.¹⁷⁶ Other poetesses of the 1650s affirmed this. Elizabeth Major, who some have seen as the author of *Eliza's Babes*, expressed similar views in her verse compilation *Honey on the Rod* (1656). Her work was published under the imprimatur of Joseph Caryl, the godly divine and rector of St Magnus, London, during the Civil

¹⁷² Francis Quarles, 'Know then my brethren, heaven is clear (1641)', in *Poetry and Revolution*, ed. by Davidson, pp. 317-319 (p. 318). For similar avowals by loyalist poets see Marchamont Nedham, *A short history of the English Rebellion* (London: 1660), p. 33; Anon, *Rump: or an exact collection of the Choycest Poems and Songs relating to the Late Times* (London: 1662), ii, p. 185.

¹⁷³ Cf., Joseph Hall, *Satans fiery darts quenched* (London: 1647), p. 177.

¹⁷⁴ Anon, *Eliza's babes* (London: 1652), p. 87.

¹⁷⁵ Anon, *Eliza's babes*, p. 87.

¹⁷⁶ I borrow this phrase from Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation*, p. 18.

Wars and Interregnum.¹⁷⁷ Here Major also made use of Psalm 113 to remind her parliamentary readers that in light of the recent upheavals of a ‘world turned upside down’ it was God who, ‘when thou wisdom seeth good to bring low, thou dost it, and when thou pleasest thou canst exalt’.¹⁷⁸

This shows how parliamentary writers used Psalm 113 to observe the social upheavals that God had wrought as either the cause or effect of the internecine fighting. Whether authors condemned or condoned these social upheavals, Psalm 113 was used to cast the Roundheads’ struggle as part of a cosmic plan whose tidal wave of change people could either ride or be swallowed by. St Nicholas was a part of this literary culture that attempted to find a scriptural language to express this sea change. By 1644, Psalm 113 had given him and others the vocabulary to justify how through war God had ‘Those got aloft that then were all kept under’.¹⁷⁹

Psalm 37.6: ‘thy judgment as the noonday’

The final psalm reference of *For My Son* is, in some ways, the most revolutionary. It appears in a passage where St Nicholas attempts to justify the war as one against monarchical oppression. To him, parliamentarianism could claim to be on the right side of history, because

I doubt not that such as are now styled here
 ‘Traitors’ and ‘rebels’ shall ere long appear
 The king’s best subjects, and their upright ways
 Shine like the sun in his most glorious rays.

[...]

[To] Serve God, good kings, and faithful parliaments¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Major is just one of several suggested identities of the author of *Eliza’s Babes*. These include a stoical Calvinist, to the Republican Elizabeth Emerson, the wife of George Wither, to a disaffected Royalist. Cf., Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), pp. 122-148.

¹⁷⁸ Elizabeth Major, *Honey on the rod: or a comfortable contemplation for one in affliction* (London: 1656), p. 8. Major cites ‘1 Samuel 2.6-7’, before quoting these lines, but they were associated with, indeed verse 8 is identical to, those of Psalm 113.7-8.

¹⁷⁹ St Nicholas, ‘A Meditation on the Way towards York... July 16, 1644’, lines 5-6, 9-10, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 37.

¹⁸⁰ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 210, 613-616, 630, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 19-28. Skippon expressed the same sentiment, quoting Psalm 37.6, ‘He shal bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgement as the noone day’, in his devotional work intended for the London Trained

Despite this avowal of loyalty to mixed monarchy, the phrase ‘for King and Parliament’, as David Underdown has observed, was the Roundheads’ watchword.¹⁸¹ St Nicholas’ political radicalism becomes even clearer when we examine his use of the image of the ‘sun’. This simile of saints and soldiers likened to the ‘glorious rays’ was an image widely echoed in anti-monarchal writings.¹⁸² Such imagery was deliberate as it inverted the traditional image of Charles I as a ‘bright sun’ in Royalist verse.¹⁸³ To gauge just how treacherous St Nicholas’ sentiments were, it was deemed seditious for an anonymous pamphleteer in 1641 to hail Parliament as ‘our bright English sun’.¹⁸⁴ St Nicholas was doing something very similar. He wryly posits that Roundheads will *only* be the ‘best subjects’ for ‘good kings’. The implication here is that Charles I is no ‘good king’ in comparison to a ‘faithful parliament’. St Nicholas’ choice between the two was an easy, if not uncompromising, one. He had resolved earlier in *For My Son*, ‘to stand and fall with those/That did defend, ’gainst such as did oppose,/The parliament’.¹⁸⁵

His sense of the righteousness of his cause against the King was authorised by scripture. St Nicholas’ similitude of parliamentarians shinning ‘like the sun in his most glorious rays’ was inspired by Psalm 37.6:

he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.

Other Civil War poets employed this psalm for the same reason. The American poet Anne Bradstreet in her ‘A Dialogue between Old England and New’, composed in 1642 and printed in 1650, used this biblical verse to assure parliamentarians (who she

Bands. Addressing parliamentarian soldiers, he used it as evidence of how ‘we shall have a good name among all, even where we have suffered shame, for God will cleare our innocency and our memory shall be blessed’ (Skippon, *A Salve for Every Sore*, p. 172).

¹⁸¹ Underdown, *Fire from Heaven*, p. 200.

¹⁸² Cf., Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent*, pp. 69-73.

¹⁸³ Cf., Tom Cain, “‘A Sad Intestine Warr’: Mildmay Fane and the Poetry of Civil Strife”, in *The English Civil Wars in the Literary Imagination*, ed. by Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), pp. 27-51 (pp. 42-43); Erna Kelly, “‘Small Types of Great Ones’: Richard Lovelace’s Separate Peace”, in *The English Civil Wars*, ed. by Summers and Pebworth, pp. 81-101 (especially p. 97).

¹⁸⁴ Anon, *Machieval as he lately appeared to his deare sons* (London: 1641), p. 1, qtd. in Hill, *The English Bible*, p. 110. By contrast, one Royalist pamphlet reflected that ‘It was a sad *Omen* to this Kingdom, to have the Sun Eclipsed that very hour the first Long Parliament began (Novemb. 3. 1640)’ (Anon, *Fair warning, or, The burnt child dreads the fire* (London: 1680), A1r.

¹⁸⁵ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 37-39, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 15.

supported) of the justice of their cause. The figure of New England comforts Old England that they will,

see these latter days of hoped-for good,
That Right may have its right, though't be with blood.
After dark popery the day did clear,
But now the *sun in's brightness shall appear*.
Blessed be the nobles of thy noble land,
With ventured lives for truth's defence that stand.
Blessed be thy commons, who for common good
And thy infringèd laws have boldly stood.¹⁸⁶

If a Roundhead victory would shine like a '*sun in's brightness*' it would be a triumph made of many beams. Bradstreet argues that complete military success is only possible because 'nobles' and 'commons', to which she later adds 'counties' and 'preachers', have dedicated their 'prayers, arms, and purse' to the parliamentary cause.¹⁸⁷ The fight was against 'dark popery' or Catholic recusants, who Bradstreet and many other writers saw as being embedded within Royalism.¹⁸⁸

St Nicholas also uses the 'sun' in *For My Son* to see the Civil War as a fight against Royalist Catholics. He describes:

I doubt not that such as are now styled here
'Traitors' and 'rebels' shall ere long appear
The king's best subjects, and their upright ways
Shine like the sun in his most glorious rays.
I doubt not but the subtle wiles and tricks

¹⁸⁶ Anne Bradstreet, 'A Dialogue between Old England and New, Concerning their Present Troubles, Anno 1642', in *Women Poets*, ed. by Ross and Scott-Baumann, pp. 47-58 (p. 55), italics my emphasis.

¹⁸⁷ Bradstreet, 'A Dialogue', in *Women Poets*, ed. by Ross and Scott-Baumann, p. 55.

¹⁸⁸ St Nicholas himself referred to the soldiers under the command of William Cavendish as 'great Newcastle's popish legion' (St Nicholas, *For My Son*, line 50, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 16). A similar sentiment was echoed in catechism used by the parliamentary Army which exclaimed, 'We know the Earl of Newcastle pretends that he fight for Religion, yet his Army is for the most part Popish' (Robert Ram, *The Souldiers Catechisme: Composed for the Parliaments Army* (4th edn., London: 1644), p. 16). For a nuanced discussion of Catholic allegiances during the 1640s see Stefania Tutino, 'The Catholic Church and the English Civil War: The Case of Thomas White', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 58.2 (April 2007), pp. 232-255.

Of students in the devil's politics,
 Of such as papists, prelates, Jesuits are,
 Shall be unmasked and to the world made bare.¹⁸⁹

Bradstreet and St Nicholas use Psalm 37 to demonstrate how their fight is not just with the King, but his Catholic advisors. Both poets reveal how victory over these foes is contingent upon religious and social solidarity amongst English Protestants.

St Nicholas' choice of Psalm 37.6, as so often in his selection of scripture, can also be glossed by its surrounding biblical verses. A few lines later this psalm not only appears to legitimise the current struggle against the King, but also provides assurance of his defeat,

(Psalm 37.14-15) The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.

To St Nicholas, victory against a wicked ruler was not a question of *if* but *when* – and Psalm 37 provided that reassurance. St Nicholas equated the 'glorious rays' with those who will eventually come to preside over a more peaceful age, but only once the 'bows shall be broken' of their enemies. This also reiterated a psalm passage included in *The Souldiers Pocket Bible*. Psalm 44.6 was included in this text to read, 'I doe not trust in my Bow, neither can my Sword save me'. This was to show that 'A Souldier must denie his owne wisdom, his own strength, & all provision for war' but trust the victory to God.¹⁹⁰

St Nicholas' use of Psalm 37 also indicates the underlying purpose of this and his other psalm citations within his prison verse epistle. The inheritance of the 'poor and needy' (Psalm 37.14) was tied to his prophetic notion of the 'poor' who shall 'rise' (taken from Psalm 113.7). This was linked, as we have seen, to the larger socio-economic agenda of parliamentary writers. Psalm 37 also revealed that the inclusion of psalms within *For My Son* served as auricular articles of praise. Psalm 37's 'upright

¹⁸⁹ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 613-620, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 28.

¹⁹⁰ Anon, *The Souldiers Pocket Bible*, p. 13.

conversation' encompassed 'singing' in scriptural passages like Ephesians 5.19, 'Speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs'. In order for a psalm to espouse his parliamentarianism (and hoped-for victory against the King), it had to be declarative not just prescriptive, sung not just written.

This brings us back to St Nicholas' earlier justification for the potency of prison praise with his sardonic use of Psalm 142.7, 'Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name'. In this way, Psalm 37 was cyclical; it harked back to the 'peals of psalms' St Nicholas had heard his inmates sing. His paraphrases were to join theirs as a speaking forth, an affirmed utterance, a testimony of faith from his lips to the page. Such acts were highly effective. Looking back, chroniclers like Baxter saw the speaking and singing of psalms by Parliament's soldiers as one of the decisive tools in winning hearts and minds during the Civil War,

because they heard the King's Soldiers with horrid Oaths abuse the name of God, and saw them live in Debauchery, and the Parliaments Soldiers flock to Sermons, and talking of Religion, and praying and *singing Psalms together* on their Guards. And all the sober Men that I was acquainted with, who were against the Parliament, were wont to say, (The King hath the better Cause, but the Parliament hath the better Men)¹⁹¹

Conclusion

St Nicholas' participation in a parliamentarian psalm culture reveals much about this movement's religious, political, and literary notions during the Civil War. His writing supports the claims of those like Sarah Ross that biblical verse paraphrases in manuscript were not 'a private devotional genre', but a mode in which poets could 'speak on wide-ranging moral, social, and political issues'.¹⁹²

Theologically speaking, St Nicholas' 'peals of psalms' show us how prisoners could signify their adherence not only to the parliamentarian cause, but to a Calvinist one too. This contributes to existing scholarship that has traced the Calvinist tendencies

¹⁹¹ Baxter, *Reliquiae*, ed. by Sylvester, p. 33, italics my emphasis.

¹⁹² Ross, *Women, Poetry, and Politics*, p. 67.

of Cromwell's men. Alexandra Walsham demonstrates that psalm singing during the English Reformation 'fostered identity and solidarity in ways that had the potential to draw people magnetically into the select band of saints'.¹⁹³ Or, as Andrew Pettegree has argued, 'Psalm singing became *the* defining activity of Calvinist activism' which was imported from Europe to England.¹⁹⁴ For the ability to sing psalms off by heart anywhere and at anytime was an important practice because it could link itself to Calvin's reformed theology and the martyrs who had died for it.¹⁹⁵ St Nicholas engages with a scripturalist affinity for recording psalm singing during the 1640s to reveal that such praise was no small act of defiance. Though it would be rash to suggest that the reformed doctrine behind psalm singing helped start the fighting of the Civil War, my research has attempted to show how it played a vital part in the writings of parliamentarians during the 1640s.

St Nicholas' enumeration of Davidic songs also chimed with an earlier literary practice of English Reformers. His latticework of psalms can be traced back to what Susan Felch calls 'psalm collage' vigorously performed by early Protestants in their prayer books. Felch argues that while medieval primers often included psalms intact, Protestant prayer books did not. Instead their authors employed 'strategies of mediated composition' to merge a variety of scriptures, including the psalms, into new prayers.¹⁹⁶ The catena of biblical verses in the margins, and the litany of psalms within the text of St Nicholas' *For My Son* clearly hark back to those used in Protestant prayer books.¹⁹⁷

Yet his psalm paraphrases are more than a prayer or an example of commonplace sententia. St Nicholas demonstrates the versatility and vitality of the psalms as a vehicle of parliamentary piety. The threading together of parts of psalms to form new songs was often seen in pro-parliamentarian broadsides, battle verses and

¹⁹³ Alexandra Walsham, 'The Godly and Popular Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. Coffey and Lim, pp. 277-293 (p. 288).

¹⁹⁴ Andrew Pettegree, 'Books, pamphlets and polemic', in *The Reformation World*, ed. by Andrew Pettegree (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 109-126 (p. 125).

¹⁹⁵ Expressed in the Preface to his Psalter of 1543, Calvin emphasized the ever-present necessity of lay psalm singing: 'even in the homes and in the fields [is] an incentive for us, and, as it were, an organ to praise God, and to lift up our hearts to Him' (qtd. in Charles Garside, Jr., 'Calvin's Preface to the Psalter: A Re-Appraisal', *The Musical Quarterly*, 37.4 (October 1951), pp. 566-577 (p. 571)).

¹⁹⁶ Susan M. Felch, "'Halff a Scrypture Woman': Heteroglossia and Female Authorial Agency in Prayers by Lady Elizabeth Tyrwhit, Anne Lock, and Anne Wheathill', in *English Women, Religion, and Textual Production, 1500-1625*, ed. by Micheline White (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 147-166 (pp. 149-50).

¹⁹⁷ Narveson, *Bible Readers*, pp. 159-169.

Thanksgiving hymns.¹⁹⁸ Henry Burton affirmed this practice amongst lay parliamentarians when he joined one ‘Mr Rayner’, the minister of Egham, in leading congregants in songs ‘most fitly and sweetly composed of many parts and parcels of Psalmes’.¹⁹⁹ St Nicholas’ bricolage was, thus, not accidental or coincidental. As we have seen it was firmly based on meanings that had been inculcated into readers from the repetition of certain psalms used in the parliamentary press of the 1640s.

I have also demonstrated that psalm writing and singing carried political significance and resonance for the Roundheads. We have seen how St Nicholas’ account was actively contributing to a literary culture of psalm paraphrasing, in print and manuscript, from pulpit to press, that was used as tools of resistance against the King’s men.²⁰⁰ Easily recognisable, certain psalms conveyed shared meanings and thus shared opposition to the Royalist forces. At no point does St Nicholas express, in the midst of defeat, defeatism. Rather than seeing his present struggles and those of the Army as a sure sign of divine disfavour, he sees them as an opportunity for a greater providential rescue. Their losses were meant to humble but not humiliate him and his comrades. Such expressions somewhat alter Hill’s conception that if parliamentarians believed in God’s ‘justification by success’ then they had to suffer the natural corollary of ‘condemnation by defeat’ on the battlefield.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ For the use of psalm marginalia as sententia in printed parliamentary poetry see *Citizen of Syon, A song of Syon of the beauty of Bethell the glory of Gods own house* (London: 1642), p. 1; Francis Thorne, *The soules solace in times of trouble* (London: 1643), p. 99-125; William Starbuck, *A spirituall song of comfort* (London: 1644), p. 1; Philalathes, *The causes and cures of an unwilling warre* (London: 1645), p. 16. For the use of it more generally in prose works, both in print and manuscript, see Richard Bernard, *The Bibles abstract and epitome* (London: 1642), p. 3; Lady Grace Mildmay, Northampton Central Library, ‘Meditations’, Phillipps MS 2569, ff. 50v-51v.

¹⁹⁹ Burton, *Life*, p. 41. As the major-general of the London Trained Bands, Sir Philip Skippon may have been referring to this practice of ‘parts and parcels’ psalm singing when addressing parliamentary soldiers. In his devotional manual written for his troops, entitled *True Treasure: Or, Thirty Holy Vowes* (1644), Skippon instructed soldiers as part of their morning and evening piety ‘to sing part of a Psalm, all in the freest and fittest season’ (Sir Philip Skippon, *True Treasure: Or, Thirty Holy Vowes* (London: 1644), p. 22).

²⁰⁰ John Tombes, *Fermentvm Pharisaeorum, or, The leaven of pharisaicall wil-worship* (London: 1643), p. 8. For the practice of singing psalms at home see William Prynne, *Hidden workes of darkenes brought to publike light* (London: 1645), pp. 167-168; Samuel Faireclough, *The saints worthinesse and the worlds worthlesnesse* (London: 1653), p. 17; Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, ‘Practical Divinity and Spirituality’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. by Coffey and Lim, pp. 191-205 (p. 200).

²⁰¹ Hill, *The Century of Revolution*, p. 169. However, St Nicholas was unusual in not seeing defeat as a sign of divine disfavour. Many parliamentary and Royalist poets espoused the providential logic that success on the battlefield was only achieved with heavenly aid and approval. One need only think of Milton’s high praise of Cromwell who had the right to rule because ‘on the neck of crowned Fortune proud/Hast reard Gods Trophies and his work pursu’d’ (John Milton, ‘To the Lord Generall Cromwell May 1652 On the proposals of certaine ministers at the Commitee for Propagation of the Gospell’, in *Poetry and Revolution*, ed. by Davidson, p. 344, line 5-6). Or Marvell’s valorisation of the Protector who ‘Could by industrious valour climb/To ruin the great work of time,/And cast the kingdoms old/Into another mould./Though Justice against Fate complain,/And plead the ancient rights in vain;/But those do

St Nicholas ‘peals of psalms’ tells us how the Bible was recycled and rehearsed by readers during this period. Helen Wilcox has shown how the poetry of the Civil War demonstrated a ‘blurring of fact and fable, individual and type’.²⁰² Nigel Smith suggests, ‘the Bible was stretched to uses and interpretations with a density which had not occurred before in England’.²⁰³ St Nicholas’ ‘psalm collage’ supports both these assertions. He was clearly adept at adapting his verse to suit Parliament’s distinct scriptural glosses. In his marginalia he cited two verses from *The Souldiers Pocket Bible* (Genesis 22.14, Deuteronomy 32.36) as well as numerous other paraphrastic allusions to its other biblical selections (Psalm 12.5, 1 Samuel 2, Isaiah 33.10, 42.24). St Nicholas’ choice of Psalms 44, 77 and 113, were also particularly apt. They were often bunched together in parliamentary tracts and fast sermons.²⁰⁴ However, his intertextual and intersectional use of the Book of Psalms is very much a mark of his own poetic stamina. The scriptures cited in the margins of *For My Son* do not always indicate (at times they obfuscate) how the corresponding line of verse has a connection to the Psalms. Only avid and eagle-eyed Bible-readers would catch these added layers of meaning.

It is fitting, then, that one of St Nicholas’ last psalm paraphrases, which forms the concluding part of *For My Son*, should be taken from a psalm whose opening line is ‘Lord, let me know mine end’ – the *Fiat voluntas Dei* of Psalm 39.13:

And live and die in this stronghold before
This war be ended, and be seen no more,
God’s will be done.²⁰⁵

hold or break,/As men are strong or weak’ (Marvell, ‘An Horatian Ode’, in *Poems*, ed. by Smith, p. 275, lines 33-40). Even loyalists like Sir John Denham conceded in *Cooper’s Hill* (1642) that ‘For armed subjects can have no pretence/Against their Princes, but their just defence,/And whether then, or no, I leave to them/To justifie, who else themselves condemne:/Yet might the fact be just, if we may guesse/The justnesse of an action from success’ (Sir John Denham, ‘Cooper’s Hill’, in *Expans’d Hieroglyphics: A Critical Edition of Sir John Denham’s Cooper’s Hill*, ed. by Brendan O’Hehir (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 131, lines 307-312).

²⁰² Helen Wilcox, ‘Exploring the Language of Devotion in the English Revolution’, in *Literature and the English Civil War*, ed. by Thomas Healy and Jonathan Sawday (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), pp. 75-90 (p. 78).

²⁰³ Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 117.

²⁰⁴ Thomas Hodges, *A glimpse of Gods glory* (London: 1642), (Psalm 44) p. 20, p. 41, (Psalm 77) p. 41, (Psalm 113) p. 27, p. 23; Henry Jessey, *The exceeding riches of grace advanced by the spirit of grace* (London: 1647), (Psalm 77) p. 80, (Psalm 113) p. 111; John White, *The troubles of Jerusalems restauration* (London: 1645), (Psalm 77) p. 12, p. 26, (Psalm 113 and Psalm 44) p. 42.

²⁰⁵ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), lines 595-597, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 27.

This neatly echoed the last words of George Wither's printed hymn 'For a Souldier' two year earlier:

For, live or dye,
 I will relye
 On thee, oh Lord, alone.
 And in this trust,
 (Though fall I must)
 I, cannot be undone.²⁰⁶

The Civil War, and the Commonwealth that followed, also produced another kind of and lesser-known song used by the saints. For alongside psalm singing and writing there was a gradual and unique poetic form used for composing and performing praise. These were songs written not in the midst of defeat, but in the aftermath of victory. They reached their apex during the Interregnum and it was then that St Nicholas took notice of them. Where he had once used a 'psalm collage' as a weapon against the Royalists, he now employed a new form of scriptural bricolage as an equally potent one against a new foe. It is his use of the parliamentary battle hymn that we shall examine next.

²⁰⁶ George Wither, 'Hymn XXXVI. For a Souldier', in *Halelviah, or, Britans [sic] second remembrancer* (London: 1641), pp. 423-427 (p. 426).

CHAPTER FOUR

‘Like pharaohs made them fall’: Scriptural Collage and Parliamentarian Battle Hymns During the 1640s–50s

Transcript of ‘In Prelium Illud Navale Inter Classes Anglorum Et Batavorum, Feb 18, 19, 20, 1652’ (1653)

BELGICA gens navibus, toto spectabilis orbe
 Anglorum immensa littora classe petunt,
 More leonino rugiunt, sperantque Britannis
 Exiguo, leges, tempore, ferre novas.
 Quosque modo summos fatebantur in orbe patronos
 Ingrata cupiunt perdere posse manu,
 Tempora mutantur; quantum tumefacta videtur
 Ranarum hec quondam sordida progenies.
 Tandem qui caelis regnat, spernitque superbos
 Tandem qui terris, qui dominatur aquis,
 Desuper imposuit fraenum fastumque nefandum
 Faedavit, mira, terribilique manu.
 Exultate Angli, domino date jubila sancti,
 Edite per terras, per mare laudis io.
 Dicite sic pereant, omnes tibi Christe inimici,
 Adveniat regnum, perfice velle tuum.

Translation: ‘On the Naval Battle between the Fleets of the English and of the Dutch, Feb 18, 19, 20, 1652’ (1653)

The Dutch, a nation renowned the whole world over, make for the English shores with their ships, a mighty fleet. They roar like lions, and hope to impose new laws in a short space of time upon the Britons. They wish with ungrateful hand to destroy those whom just now they acknowledged as their chief patrons in the world. Times change. How puffed up does this one time sordid progeny of frogs seem! Finally he who reigns in

heaven, and scorns the proud, he who rules on land and sea, imposes a check from above, and has stained their wicked pride with his wonderful and terrible hand. Rejoice, you English; in holy fashion give songs to the Lord, and proclaim the Halleluiah of praise through land and sea. Say, ‘O Christ, may all thine enemies perish thus, thy kingdom come, perform thy will.

Transcript of ‘An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory God Was Pleased to Give the English over the Dutch at Sea, February, 18, 19, 20, 1652’ (1653)

Come, saints, lift up your heads and see
What God hath lately done.
Tune up your hearts, make melody,
Sing praises, everyone.

Awake your glories, up and sing,
Your loudest songs of praise
To your great God, to Christ your king
With warm affections raise.

Our God, who not long since on shore
So oft our enemies quelled
So gloriously as heretofore
Can scarce be paralleled.

Our king of kings, who for to clear
His power and justice both,
Did make his glittering sword draw near
England’s great behemoth.

This God, our God, his standard reared
On th’ocean deep and wide,
And there hath gloriously appeared
On his poor servants’ side.

This God, our God, who from the paws
 Of th'lion rescue can,
 Hath put his hook into the jaws
 Of th'Dutch leviathan.

O how that lion roarèd and
 Breathed threats in hope to see
 Their conquest had upon the land
 Of our nativity.

O how that proud leviathan
 Triumphed in hope, at length,
 To master all the ocèan
 By his great naval strength.

But in the day of small things, God
 Appeared and scorned them all,
 And with his mighty arm and rod
 Like pharaohs made them fall.

And wherein they waxed proud, the Lord
 Above them was, for he
 Made them our meat, made good his word,
 Gave us the victory.

O then let us with one consent
 Lift up our voice and say,
 'Twas God, 'twas God alone who sent
 Deliverance in that day.

And not to us, Lord, not to us,
 But to thy name be praise,
 Who thyself work'st salvation thus,

For thy poor saints always.

And so let all thine enemies fall
That do oppose thy son;
And let each one about the throne
Say, 'Lord, so be it done'.

In this chapter I want to argue that St Nicholas' 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... over the Dutch at Sea... 1652' (1653) demonstrates a scripturalist culture of battle hymn writing within the early 1650s.¹ Textual influences throughout his manuscript hymn will reveal how St Nicholas was responding to other battle hymns in print by other hymnologists as part of this practice of composition in England. In order to place St Nicholas' work in its proper historical, cultural and literary settings this chapter examines the important developments of the English battle hymn both before and during Cromwell's Commonwealth. The term 'battle hymn' will refer to songs written by parliamentarian poets to celebrate military victories against the Royalist, Scottish and Dutch forces during a decade of almost endless fighting. Many of these were written for Thanksgiving Day ceremonies ordered by Parliament which could be performed in both domestic and congregational settings. Therefore, though the term 'battle hymn' is not contemporary to these works, it seems a fitting sobriquet to describe their content and purpose.

I will begin by investigating the various formal and functional options made available to hymn writers in England during the 1640s–1650s. This will help to understand the motivations that might have led St Nicholas and others to write a battle hymn. I will then demonstrate the evolution of the battle hymn itself. Here we will see how this form developed from the doggerel 'triumphant Songs' of the 1640s to the highly structured 'hymns' of the early 1650s.

This chapter elucidates some of the key values, rarely discussed, surrounding religious poetry and its evolving use as praise. I will show English hymnologists, lay and clerical, as imaginative defenders of hymns and creative practitioners of them. Further, I will show that their compositions operated within a set of coherent literary premises that appealed to the broad desire for new and sacred songs. In so doing, English hymns, and battle hymns in particular, are shown not just as exercises in poetic expression, but as serious and well thought out acts of devotion. However, because my subject matter is based on recent discoveries, this chapter has some way to go before its claims can be considered definitive. Nonetheless, much like the previous chapter, St Nicholas' writing provides a platform from which to view the communal identity of

¹ Thomas St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory God Was Pleased to Give the English over the Dutch at Sea, February, 18, 19, 20, 1652' (1653), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 44–45.

scripturalism that sought to shape itself through its shared composition and implementation of its 'loudest songs of praise'.²

The Historiography

Protestant hymns in England have often received insufficient attention. There are several reasons for this. Broadly speaking, as Micheline White states, the early modern English hymn is still very much an 'understudied' area.³ This is particularly so amongst literary scholars where, as J. R. Watson demonstrates, 'hymns have been neglected by students of literature' whom he finds consistently ignoring their 'religious provenance and function'.⁴ This is because early modern hymns intended for worship, whether in manuscript or print, have proven difficult to analyse. In particular, there were no established hymnals authorised by the English Church for any extended period of time until the Enlightenment.⁵ As a result, printed hymns during the first half of the seventeenth century were necessarily seen as transitory. Frequently only going into a single edition, their impact and significance can be viewed as small, and it is hard to trace any readers of them. When vernacular hymns did manage to go into several editions, and this was rare, their texts were protean ones. They were constantly altered and revised by their well-intentioned authors to appease the critiques of congregational singers.⁶ This makes proving any consistent cultural influence they may have exerted on other authors somewhat difficult. Manuscript hymns, when they can be found, suffered from a different set of problems. Were they original or copies? Were they intended for private or communal devotion? Were they ever even circulated or published? Like any handwritten text during this period, the author's intentions are left to the literary scholar to piece together.

Such problems are further aggravated by scholarship that prizes later hymns. It can be traced to an early belief amongst researchers that the eighteenth century saw the

² St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652' (1653), line 6, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 44.

³ Micheline White, 'Women's Hymns in Mid-Sixteenth-Century England: Elisabeth Cruciger, Miles Coverdale, and Lady Elizabeth Tyrwhit', *ANQ*, 24.1-2 (2011), pp. 21-32 (p. 21).

⁴ J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 9-10.

⁵ The only exception is William Barton who continually re-published and added hymns in his printed works. Cf., William Barton, *A Century Of select hymns* (London: 1659); *Four centuries of select hymns* (London: 1668); *Six centuries of select hymns* (London: 1688).

⁶ Watson, *The English Hymn*, pp. 10-11.

heyday of Protestant hymn writing in England. In his *The Worship of the English Puritans* Horton Davies attributes the creation of hymnology to the Independent minister Isaac Watts ‘in whom paraphrases of psalms develop into hymns’.⁷ More recent scholars such as N. J. G. Pounds, in his *A History of the English Parish*, still agree with this opinion.⁸ Even when Richard Arnold, in his promisingly titled *The English Hymn: Studies in a Genre*, discusses the origins of this form in the seventeenth century, he provides a short prolegomena to what he sees as the hymn’s more popular employment in the following century.⁹ By contrast, my evidence will show that more than half a century earlier there was a clear consensus on vernacular hymn composition in print and manuscript in England.

If there is a perceptible lack of interest in Protestant hymns written in England during the early modern period, there is a palpable disregard for those composed by Bible-minded readers. This is twofold. Firstly, such writers have often been wrongly blamed for the apparent late evolution of the hymn in England. John Julian stated in his *Dictionary of Hymnology* that vernacular English ‘hymns might have become a recognised part of Church worship’ in the seventeenth century but for the ‘reaction’ of scriptural purists which he saw as being completely against them.¹⁰ Secondly, when such hymns are discussed they are denigrated because of what is perceived as their doggerel composition and unoriginality in paraphrasing scripture. As Champlin Burrage remarked about them in *The Early English Dissenters*, ‘Who would ever read them to-day except as curiosities of expression’ as ‘none of them are of any poetical merit... lacking in rhythm’.¹¹ This again is part of a long standing academic snobbery

⁷ Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (London: Dacre Press, 1948), p. 162. Also see Davies, *Worship and Theology*, II, pp. 281-285.

⁸ N. J. G. Pounds, *A History of the English Parish: The Culture of Religion from Augustine to Victoria* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), p. 489.

⁹ Richard Arnold, *The English Hymn: Studies in a Genre* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), pp. 1-34. These omissions are also tied to a greater interest in an early modern *psalm* culture rather than a *hymn* one. This is as much historically rooted, as it is a contemporary mindset amongst scholars. Those like Louis F. Benson have shown the ‘supremacy of the Psalm’ set against the ‘suppression of the Hymn’ by Church officials during the long Reformation (Benson, *The English Hymn*, p. 22). Though such notions need qualifying, they help explain modern criticism’s rigorous dissection of English psalms that have made them all too familiar articles to researchers, as opposed to early English hymns which are seen as peculiar texts.

¹⁰ John Julian, *A Dictionary of Hymnology: Setting Forth the Origin and History of Christian Hymns of all Ages and Nations*, 2 vols (London: 1907), I, pp. 343-348 (p. 343).

¹¹ Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), I, p. 212.

that has dismissed the hymn form altogether. As David Cecil tersely put it in *The Oxford Book of Christian Verse*, ‘Hymns are usually a second-rate type of poetry’.¹²

Nonetheless, as hymn scholarship has progressed, so too have investigations into the compositions written in England. However, where old problems have been addressed, new ones have arisen. Where a culture of scriptural hymn writing in England has been acknowledged, it has only been seen as taking place after the Restoration. As Charles Stanley Phillips confidently declared in *Hymnody Past and Present* it was only ‘during the Restoration period that the first tentative steps were taken towards the evolution of the “English hymn”’.¹³ Walter Wilson also did not recognise any hymns written before this time in *The History and Antiquities of the Dissenting Churches*. Instead he argued that ‘It was with great difficulty that singing [of hymns] was first introduced among the Dissenters, and for a long time it only obtained partially’.¹⁴ Sharon Achinstein, though correcting Wilson’s argument, also only examines hymns written by Baptists and Quakers after the return of Charles II in *Literature and Dissent in Milton’s England*.¹⁵

If the study of vernacular hymns after the fall of Cromwell’s Commonwealth is gradually being re-evaluated in scholarship, battle hymns during that Commonwealth, however, have remained understudied. Watson, despite having a section on ‘Psalms and Hymns’, overlooks them completely during the Civil War and Commonwealth in his *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study*.¹⁶ Benson’s *The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship* is also strangely silent on the existence of battle hymns and instead focuses on the offerings of court poets during the 1630s.¹⁷ Nigel Smith does discuss battle hymns in his *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660*, but mostly by Royalists and excludes most of those mentioned below.¹⁸ Only Elizabeth Clarke encourages an examination of English hymns during the 1640s–50s in

¹² David Cecil, ‘Introduction’, in *The Oxford Book of Christian Verse*, ed. by David Cecil (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), i-xxxii (p. xxiii).

¹³ Charles Stanley Phillips, *Hymnody Past and Present* (1937), p. 158.

¹⁴ Walter Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of the Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses in London, Westminster and Southwark*, 4 vols (London: 1808–1814), III, p. 557.

¹⁵ Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent*, pp. 210–242.

¹⁶ Watson, *The English Hymn*, pp. 103–133.

¹⁷ Louis F. Benson, *The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915), pp. 63–67.

¹⁸ Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, pp. 260–276. Smith is the only one I know of to use the phrase ‘battle hymns’ to describe songs written during the Civil War.

her essay in *Dissenting Praise: Religious Dissent and the Hymn in England and Wales*.¹⁹ My chapter answers that call and greatly builds on her findings.

Consequently, this chapter bridges the historical gap which till now has only examined the Continental battle hymns that were used during the Reformation, those used during the American Civil War, and finally those employed in Scotland during the nineteenth century.²⁰ In doing so, it provides a greater understanding of the development and evolution of a scripturalist literary movement that helped contribute to the early modern English hymn.

The Cultural Context

It is well known that Protestant hymn writing in the vernacular had developed in England from the Reformation onwards.²¹ Yet it was not until the 1640s–50s that a surge of writing on and of English hymns was fully realised by parliamentarian writers. Here they became dynamic articles whereby, as the Independent minister (and later Fifth Monarchist) John Rogers put it in 1653, worshippers could either ‘*pray, expound, read, [or] sing Hymns*’.²²

Ministers, who often preached before the Commons, provided detailed instructions on the creation and utility of English hymns. Amidst a sceptical environment, where any innovations to acts of worship not already prescribed in the

¹⁹ Elizabeth Clarke, ‘Hymns, Psalms, and Controversy in the Seventeenth Century’, in *Dissenting Praise: Religious Dissent and the Hymn in England and Wales*, ed. by Isabel Rivers and David L. Wykes (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), pp. 13–32 (pp. 16–19).

²⁰ Cf., Kyle C. Sessions, ‘Song Pamphlets: Media Changeovers in Sixteenth-Century Publicization’, in *Print and Culture in the Renaissance: Essays on the Advent of Printing in Europe*, ed. by Gerald P. Tyson and Sylvia S. Wagonheim (Newark; London: University of Delaware Press, 1986); Christian McWhirter, *Battle Hymns: The Power and Popularity of Music in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Tom Gallagher and Graham Walker, eds., *Sermons and Battle Hymns: Protestant Popular Culture in Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1990).

²¹ Cf., Margo Todd, *Reformation to Revolution: Politics and Religion in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 41–42; Marsh, *Music and Society*, p. 420; Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559–1625* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 237–238; Watts, *Cheap Print*, pp. 187–188; Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), p. 75. The hymn as a vehicle for worship is of course an ancient one that can be found within the Catholic *Breviary* and traced right back to pagan antiquity. Cf., Dom Baudot, *The Breviary: Its History and Contents*, trans. by the Benedictines of Stanbrook (London: Herder, 1929), pp. 65–71; E. G. Stanley, ‘New Formulas for Old: Cædmon’s Hymn’, in *Pagans and Christians: The Interplay between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by T. Hofstra and A. A. MacDonald (Groningen, Netherlands: Forsten, 1995), pp. 131–148.

²² John Rogers, *Ohel or Beth-shemesh A... true Gospel-church state* (London: 1653), p. 437. Rogers’ congregation at Dublin’s Christ Church was attended by several Cromwellian officers, so his views on hymns would have been widely disseminated. Cf., Greaves, ‘Rogers, John (b. 1627)’, *ODNB*.

Directory for Publique Worship (1645) were seen as sectarian, clergymen had to outline a coherent and robust defence for writing and singing hymns of the saints' own making. Although this practice was not taken up by all Roundheads, those who Wither calls 'fanaticke fools' who 'Perceive not, with, what good effects we may/Use them [hymns] in our devotions', it appealed to many moderates and radicals alike.²³

Hymns were to be written in verse and not prose, because it was believed that 'the Holy Ghost bids sing, which thou canst not deny, it doth bid Measure words in Syllables, without which there can be no singing', and that this did 'justifie meter or rhithm'.²⁴ Hymns were to be premeditated and not extemporaneous compositions for the Bible did 'argue not [for] sudden rapsodicall singing'.²⁵ They could be written by clergy or laity alike as long as they possessed the 'gift of poesie'.²⁶ Although the concern over spontaneous utterances had led several ministers to recommend a tried and tested poetic form – the rigid metres and rhythms made famous by Sternhold and Hopkins, and in particular the Standard Common Meter, in their *The Whole Booke of Psalmes* (1562).²⁷

Clergymen agreed that hymns should not follow the way of psalms sung in the Established Church (which were put to music) but rather be performed *a cappella*.²⁸ Some found such calls pedantic, others merely pragmatic.²⁹ Hymns were to be sung in

²³ George Wither, *British Appeals, with Gods mercifull replies on behalf of the Commonwealth of England contained in a brief commemorative poem, composed for a memoriall of some of those many signall mercies lately vouchsafed to this republike, especially for those deliverances upon the appeals of the Parliaments and royall forces at Naseby: of the English and Scottish armies neer Dunbar in Scotland, and for the late surrender of Eden-burgh Castle* (London: 1651), p. 46. This was probably in reference to the Levellers, who despised all forms of worship that had been invented by man.

²⁴ William Kaye, *A plain answer to the... singing of Davids Psalms* (London: 1654), p. 13, mispaginated as 14. Also see Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, B3v; John Cotton, *Singing of Psalmes a Gospel-ordinance* (London: 1650), p. 32. Such notions were seen as radical during this period. Jane Hawkins was ridiculed by the Established Church for falling into a three day 'rapture' or 'trance' in St Ives in 1629 in which she began to 'preach in verse' becoming a 'rhyming preacheress' in an auditory of nearly 200 people. Though her verse sermons were transcribed by observers, the 'copy and originals' were seized by the authorities. Cf., *CSPD*, 1628-9, p. 530.

²⁵ Nathanael Homes, *Gospel musick. Or, The singing of Davids psalms* (London: 1644), p. 17; also see Thomas Ford, *Singing of Psalmes the duty of Christians under the New Testament* (London: 1653), p. 18.

²⁶ Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, B3v; Cotton, *Singing of Psalmes*, p. 32.

²⁷ Ford, *Singing of Psalmes*, pp. 29-30; Homes, *Gospel musick*, p. 17; George Wither, *Three grains of spirituall frankincense infused into three hymnes of praise* (London: 1651), A3r; Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, A2r-A3v.

²⁸ John Robotham, *The whole booke of Solomons song* (London: 1651), p. 6; Joseph Mede, *Diatribae discourses on divers texts of Scripture* (London: 1642), p. 181, p. 180; Homes, *Gospel musick*, p. 3. Also cf., Stephen Wright, 'Robotham, John (d. 1664?)', *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, May 2008.

²⁹ On the one hand, Cromwell's government could never officially sanction hymn singing without music (though they were not against singing hymns in principle). If they had it would have seriously threatened the general popularity and continuity of the singing of psalms to instruments which had glued many orthodox Church members together in previous decades. On the other hand, parliamentary ministers were reluctant to lobby for instrumental hymn singing as part of State sponsored worship. If they had,

churches and by all congregants. As William Barton argued in 1651, those who insisted that ‘one should sing... and the rest hear, it is but an imagination, and that [scripturally] groundless’.³⁰ For this reason hymns were particularly popular at Independent meetings in London.³¹ Independents and even some Presbyterians endorsed singing hymns in mixed congregations, that is singing with sinners.³² Most importantly for my purposes, in the religious fervour of the 1640s–1650s, biblical precedents were mined to show that hymns were appropriate acts of ‘thanksgiving’ to commemorate Parliament’s victories over its enemies.³³ This spurred Englishmen to write their own battle hymns over the same period. Here doctrinal musings were answered in songs that replaced theological debate with practical performance.³⁴

Battle hymns were a mongrel form. They were a composite of several other literary genres during the 1640s–1650s. They were a part of Parliament’s culture of battle writings: psalm paraphrases on skirmishes won and lost (as we have seen), texts such as *The Souldiers Pocket Bible*, printed prose which lauded their military successes in pamphlets that were read in Churches, sermons rousing the people to war, and thanksgiving prayers for safety during the conflict.³⁵ They were also heavily influenced

they risked alienating their flocks by having hymns face a similar fate as the psalms by being put to the same music as street ballads, or drowning out the amateur praises of their congregations by use of professional organs or choirs.

³⁰ Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, B4r.

³¹ Christopher Feake, *Mr Feakes Hymne* (Christ’s Church: 11 Aug. 1653), not paginated; Mr Appletree, *Three hymnes, or certain excellent new Psalmes, composed by those three reverend, and learned divines. Mr. John Goodwin, Mr. Dasoser [sic] Powel, and Mr. Appletree. Sung in their respective congregations* (London: 1650), pp. 1–11. This makes sense as London was the centre for parliamentarians where around 24 per cent of godly clergy held lectureships in the city as their first appointments, and of the total number of lecturers active in the capital, roughly 78 per cent can be considered parliamentarian during this period. Cf., P. S. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent 1560–1662* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1970), p. 310, p. 268.

³² Ford, *Singing of Psalmes*, p. 53, p. 172; Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, B4r; Jonathan Clapham, *Singing of Psalmes* (London: 1656), p. 4; John Hanson, *Singing of Psalmes* (London: 1658), p. 79; Cotton, *Singing of Psalmes*, p. 48.

³³ Homes, *Gospel musick*, p. 14; Ford, *Singing of Psalmes*, p. 121.

³⁴ In these printed treatises ‘psalms’ and ‘hymns’ were interchangeable and synonymous. This is because, as discussed below, during the seventeenth century, poetically, not just theologically, ‘psalms’ and ‘hymns’ were often seen as one and the same thing.

³⁵ For the practice of reading printed battle chronicles in Church see David Buchanan, *An explanation of some truths, of the carriage of things about this great work* (London: 1645), p. 57. For battles sermons see Heylyn, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 16–22/04/43 (Oxford: 1643), p. 203. For thanksgiving battle prayers see Anon, *A manuall of devotions* (London: 1644), pp. 52–58; and Anon, *The Souldiers Pocket Bible*, p. 15. Unlike the Reformed Churches on the Continent, parliamentarians did not appear to hang captured military banners or recovered cannon balls in their churches, in thanksgiving for success in battle, withstanding a siege or the defeat of their opponents. Cf., Andrew Spicer, ‘The Material Culture of Early Modern Churches’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Catherine Richardson, Tara Hamling and David Gaimster (London; New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 82–97 (p. 90).

by printed verse chronicles which described God's deliverance during battles and sieges.³⁶ They appear, however, not to have been influenced by the better known wartime panegyrics such as Milton's sonnet 'On the Lord General Fairfax at the Siege of Colchester' (1648) or Marvell's 'Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell's Return to Ireland' (1650).³⁷

If their influences were varied, their purpose was singular – to sing of and signify their enemies' defeat. This was demonstrated by a pro-parliamentarian newsbook, *The True Informer*, which opened with a lengthy invocation to sing battle hymns to God after the victory obtained by Parliament at the Battle of Marston Moor (2 July 1644). The editor Henry Whalley, in a passage largely plagiarised from *Meroz Cursed* (1642)³⁸ – the printed fast sermon preached by Stephen Marshall before Parliament two years earlier – spoke ardently about why victory hymns were not just biblically acceptable, but customary for God fearing Englishmen to sing:

It has been a custome almost amongst all Nations, after any notable victorie, to have their triumphant Songs... The Romans had their *Salii*, Priests, who after any victorie, went dancing through the City, singing their *Hymnes* and *Peans* to *Mars*, and the rest of the favourable gods... This course I think, the Devil learn'd from the Lord *Jehovah*'s dealing with his owne people, who alwaies directeth them thus to celebrate his noble acts, and their great deliverances; Thus... *Moses* and *Aaron* sang unto the Lord, *Exod.* 15. when he triumphed gloriously over *Pharaoh* and all his Hoste, making them like a stone in the bottome of the Red-Sea... This indeed was the custome of the Church of God in ancient

³⁶ For parliamentary battle verse see John Vicars, *God on the mount* (London: 1643), p. 406; William Lithgow, *A true experimentall and exact relation upon that famous and renowned siege of Newcastle... Together with a succinct commentarie upon the battell of Bowdon Hill, and that victorious battell of York or Marston Moore, never to be forgotten* (London: 1645); and Anon, *Verses on the siege of Glocester, and Col. Massey* (London: 1646).

³⁷ Cf., John Milton, 'On the Lord General Fairfax at the Siege of Colchester (1648)', in *John Milton: The Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by John Carey (Harlow: Longman, 2007), pp. 323-325; Andrew Marvell, 'An Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell's Return to Ireland (1650)', in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. by Nigel Smith (Harlow: Longman, 2003), pp. 267-280.

³⁸ Marshall's text for this sermon was Judges 5.23: 'Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD'. Though it was preached in response to the horrors of the Irish Rebellion (1641), it was printed and preached several times over the 1640s. For a detailed discussion on the influence of Judges 5.23 on parliamentary sermons, tracts, histories, libels, and songs, see Jordan S. Downs, 'The Curse of Meroz and the English Civil War', *The Historical Journal*, 57 (June 2014), pp. 343-368.

time, and in all times... yet that there should be any that calls himself a Protestant or free borne man that should not rejoice in and unto God... that those who have not been thankfull for the late success over Prince *Rupert*, whether out of ingratitude or obstinacie, would now be humbled for it, and indeavour to walk more worthy of so great a mercy, in keeping... Humiliation or Thanksgiving... when a deliverance is bestowed.³⁹

I quote this at length to show how important battle praise was seen to be in endearing the reading public to Parliament's war effort. Crucially, Whalley had made battle hymns democratic to be composed and sung by any 'Protestant' or 'free born' parliamentarian. St Nicholas was evidently one of the men who had not only read but actually responded to Whalley's call for biblically authorised 'triumphant Songs'.⁴⁰

Battle hymns emerged from eclectic 'triumphant Songs' during the Civil War to become more homogenous 'hymns' during the Interregnum. Like earlier battle songs, many appeared only in single editions. This did not speak to their ephemerality but rather their specificity. They were occasional, meant to celebrate particular military victories by Parliament. To re-print them for other such triumphs would be seen as anathema, because it was no different than to saying by rote the assigned BCP prayer for 'A thanksgiving for peace and victory' used by the Established Church⁴¹ and variants of which appeared in printed 'Thanksgivings' by the Royalists.⁴²

³⁹ Henry Whalley, *The True Informer*, 20-27/07/44 (London: 1644), pp. 289-290. For the original passage see Stephen Marshall, *Meroz cursed* (London: 1642), pp. 1-2. However, because hymn singing had not been authorised by the Established Church, some newsbooks during the Civil War could never explicitly encourage the singing of hymns. Instead they told their readers to render 'praise' to the Lord for Parliament's successes on the battlefield. Cf., Elizabeth Alkin, *Impartial Scout*, 12-19/07/50 (London: 1650), p. 244; Robert Ibbitson, *Severall Proceedings in Parliament*, 2-9/01/51 (London: 1651), p.1007; Ibbitson, *Severall Proceedings in Parliament*, 24-31/07/51 (London: 1651), p. 1473.

⁴⁰ For St Nicholas' praise to God for the victory at the Battle of Marston Moor, see 'A Meditation on the Way towards York... July 16, 1644', in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 37.

⁴¹ Cf., Church of England, *The Booke of Common Prayer* (London: 1603), B6r. This thanksgiving prayer was retained when the BCP was revised in 1662. Cf., Church of England, 'The Book of Common Prayer, 1662', in *The Book of Common Prayer*, ed. by Cummings, p. 269.

⁴² Cf., Anon, *A prayer of thanks giving for his majesties late victory over the rebels* (Oxford: 1642); Church of England, *A forme of common-prayer to be used... For the averting of Gods judgements now upon us; for the ceasing of this present rebellion* (Oxford: 1643); Anon, *A forme of common-prayer, to be used... For a blessing on the treaty now begunne, that the end of it may be a happy peace to the King and to all his people* (Oxford: 1645). Of these, I have only found one prayer in prose which was titled as a 'hymne'. Cf., Brian Duppa, *A collection of prayers and thanksgivings* (Oxford: 1643), pp. 8-9. Such thanksgiving prayers were ridiculed by the parliamentarian press. Cf., Anon, *The Cavaliers new common-prayer booke unclasp't* (London: 1644), pp. 9-10.

Unlike other battle songs, battle hymns were usually written in anticipation of Thanksgiving Days for specific military triumphs. During the 1640s–1650s, the Commons usually printed its Orders for Thanksgiving Days for military victories a month before the celebrations were due to take place.⁴³ By examining St Nicholas' battle hymn alongside those of others, a rich picture emerges of a community of scriptural poets that informed and inspired one another's songs of praise.

Songs of Posterity

One of the main attributes of battle hymns was their call to posterity. They were premised on previous songs within English and biblical history. St Nicholas contributed to this literary trend in his first and only battle hymn proper, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... Over the Dutch at Sea... 1652' (1653). His composition takes place during the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652–1654). It refers in particular to the naval engagement that took place off the coast of the Isle of Portland – known as the Three Days Battle (18–20 February 1653) – where the British fleet had faced off a much larger force of Dutch warships.⁴⁴ St Nicholas, like other battle hymn writers, saw such a victory as part of the wider catalogue of God's providences to England.⁴⁵ The naval triumph over the Dutch served as a reminder to him of the one over the Spanish fleet in 1588:

Our God, who not long since on shore
So oft our enemies quelled
So gloriously as heretofore

⁴³ Natalie Mears, Alasdair Raffie and Stephen Taylor, eds., *National Prayers: Special Worship since the Reformation: Volume 1: Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings in the British Isles, 1533–1688*, 4 vols (Church of England Record Society, 2013), I, pp. 559–560.

⁴⁴ For a narration of this sea battle in print see Anon, *A Perfect relation of the great fight between the English and Dutch fleets* (London: 1653). For an illustration of it see the frontispiece to: Anon, *A Great victory obtained by the English against the Hollanders* (London: 1653).

⁴⁵ His battle hymn can be seen as following the swathe of parliamentary verse in print concerning these wars. Cf., Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, pp. 282–283. Also cf., Anon, *Ad populum: or, A low-country lecture to the people of England, after a Thanksgiving dinner* (London: 1653), B1r; Anon, *The newes, or, The full particulars of the last fight. Comprising the sum of all intelligence between the English and the Dutch at sea* (London: 1653), p. 1. St Nicholas' choice of subject matter is also unsurprising as many followed the Dutch Wars, and this victory in particular, in their letters and diaries. Cf., Josselin, *Diary*, ed. by Macfarlane, p. 102; *The Manuscripts of his Grace the Duke of Portland*, ed. by Cartwright, III, pp. 198–202.

Can scarce be paralleled.⁴⁶

Even if St Nicholas had ignored such historical ‘parallel[s]’, the battle with the Dutch was one worth singing about. Of the twelve ships that were destroyed over the three days of fighting, only one was English. Two thousand of the enemy were slain and nearly fifteen hundred were taken prisoner. This proved cumbersome to the English authorities who could not find enough space to hold them.⁴⁷ It was a decisive victory that much weakened Dutch naval strength and proved that English soldiers ‘who had been trained on land could fight at sea’.⁴⁸ For by this point in the war more than sixteen-hundred of the Dutch ships had fallen into the hands of English sailors, and Englishmen would not let the Dutch forget it.⁴⁹

Such calls to posterity had occurred in earlier battle hymns composed by parliamentarian poets. One such example was a broadside entitled *Berachah, or Englands Memento to Thankfulness Being a Hymne* (1646), written by one R. P. a ‘*Minister of Gods Word*’. In a hymn composed in the Standard Common Metre, R. P. demonstrated how the Hebrew names of God manifested their meaning in the recent battles won by Parliament:

Iehovah Shammah, Taunton we
may call for God was there.
Iohovah nissi, Gloucester,
For he their banner were,
Iohavah Iareth, Nazeby. said
we likewise well may call.⁵⁰

R. P. clearly saw himself as a poet-chronicler. His battle hymn was to be a longstanding, and not just a recent, record of remembrance:

The generation yet to come

⁴⁶ St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652’ (1653), lines 9-12, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 44.

⁴⁷ Whetham, *Life*, ed. by W. C. Dampier and C. D. H. Dampier, pp. 140-145.

⁴⁸ Whetham, *Life*, ed. by W. C. Dampier and C. D. H. Dampier, p. 146.

⁴⁹ Macaulay, *History of England*, V, p. 92.

⁵⁰ R. P., *Berachah, or Englands memento to thankfulness being a hymne or spirituall song setting forth the praises of God* (London: 1646), broadside.

thy workes shall celebrate.
 And eke declare the mighty acts
 which thou hast wrought alate.⁵¹

Such lines were picked up by William Barton in his *Certain Hymns, Composed out of Scripture, to Celebrate some Special and Publick Occasions* (1651). Written for Cromwell's victories at Dunbar (3 September 1650) and Worcester (3 September 1651), Barton saw his songs as fit memorials of God's providence:

How great a crown of glory
 Hath God set on your Head!
 And brought you into Story
 Of all men to be read!
 A thousand thousand Pages
 Your Chronicle shall write,
 And all ensuing ages
 Shall read it with delight.⁵²

Like St Nicholas and R. P., Barton's choice of battles were deliberate and designed to signal his allegiance to the parliamentary cause. For Dunbar, next to Naseby, was considered the clearest example of God's providence at work in an engagement that had proven truly decisive. In contrast to the three thousand that had perished in the defending Scottish army, no more than twenty Englishmen had been slain.⁵³ The Battle of Worcester a year later, saw the routing of the Scots as a victory of the people as much as of Cromwell's army. This was because a third of his fighting men consisted of local militia regiments.⁵⁴ By memorialising the triumphs at Dunbar and Worcester, Barton

⁵¹ R. P., *Englands memento*, broadside.

⁵² William Barton, *Hallelujah. Or certain hymns, composed out of Scripture, to celebrate some special and publick occasions. By W.B. M.A. With two more lately composed by a wel-wisher to the Parliament of the Common-wealth of England. Upon occasion of those two glorious and most remarkable appearances of God for them, at Dunbar and Worcester: both upon that memorable day Septemb. 3. 1650. 1651* (London: September, 1651), p. 4. His second edition repeated this message. Cf., William Barton, *Psalms and hymns composed and fitted for the present occasion of publick thanks-giving, October 24, 1651 by W. Barton* (London: October, 1651), p. 1, p. 3.

⁵³ Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, 1649–1656*, 4 vols (London: Longmans, 1903), I, p. 295.

⁵⁴ Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth*, II, p. 47.

was capitalising and counting on the ‘national spirit of England’ that such military victories were seen to represent.⁵⁵

Other parliamentary poets soon followed Barton in writing battle hymns for one or both of these key victories. George Wither, perhaps because of the fact that he was Barton’s competitor for Parliament’s approval of a national verse psalter, saw an opportunity to compose his own battle hymns. In his printed collection entitled *The British Appeals* (1651) Wither encouraged his readers ‘In new-Thanksgiving Songs;/Come, let us sing/[S]trains, that may make, the walls to shake,/The Roofs to ring’.⁵⁶ His hymns were to honour, as his work’s title made clear, ‘*those deliverances upon the... English and Scottish Armies neer Dunbar in Scotland, and for the late Surrender of Edinburgh-Castle*’.⁵⁷ Like Barton’s, Wither’s compositions clearly harked back to the tradition of battle praise during the Civil War. Yet Wither also explained that such songs were a part of the longer recorded history of God’s people:

Gods, *Prophets*, who, knew best what did belong
To *praises*; did expresse them, oft, in *Song*,
And, left them written, as the best *Records*,
To memorize, what *present time* affords,
Worth recommending to Posterity:
Or, of safe keeping it in memorie:
For, seeing *Hymnes*
[...] but are a *story*,

⁵⁵ Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth*, II, p. 48. The acceptance of his battle hymns as effective mediums of worship was further aided by the fact that as late as 1657 Barton’s versification of the Psalms was still being considered by Parliament for incorporation into their *Directory for Publique Worship*. Cf., Hill, *The English Bible*, p. 360.

⁵⁶ George Wither, *The British appeals, with Gods mercifull replies, on the behalfe of the Commonwealth of England Contained in a brief commemorative poem, composed for a memorial of some of those many signall mercies, lately vouchsafed to this rebublike; especially, for those deliverances upon the appeales of the Parliaments, and royall forces at Naseby; of the English and Scottish armies neer Dunbar in Scotland, and for the late surrender of Edinburgh-Castle, &c. By Geo. Wither, Esquire* (London: 1651), p. 51. This included the compositions in Wither’s *Three Hymnes of Praise* that was published that same year.

⁵⁷ Wither was no stranger to hymn writing, indeed, he was quite a prolific author of this genre. Apart from his initial forays into battle songs, (as seen above), his constant experimentation with this form can be seen in *Hymns and Songs of the Church* (1623) which he dedicated to King James I, as well as his *Halelujah, or, Britans Second Remembrancer* (1641) which he dedicated to Parliament. Wither’s shifting patronage may have been as much opportunistic as a realisation that the potential of the vernacular hymn form was gradually being realised by parliamentary rather than Royalist writers in the years leading up to the Civil War.

Expressing, briefly, to th' *almighties* Glory,
Matter, of fact, (as that which hath been done,
 Lately for us, or many ages gone,⁵⁸

Wither emphasized the sheer ingenuity of battle hymns. That their poets must creatively express a '*story*' through the medium of a singable '*Song*' whilst maintaining a reliable '*Record*' that depicted a concise but unbiased '*Matter, of fact*' account of battles won. To Wither the intention to preserve the memories of victories for 'Posterity' was a real one, as he believed that the writing of battle hymns was part of an ancient Christian tradition first begun by God's '*Prophets*'.

The appeal of the battle hymn to parliamentary poets was further illustrated in those composed by the Independent minister John Goodwin in his printed pamphlet: *Two hymns, or spirituall songs... for that most wonderfull and happy successe of the English army under the conduct of his excellency the Lord General Cromwel over the Scottish forces at Worcester* (1651). As with Barton and Wither, Goodwin saw battle hymns as mnemonic:

O let this great salvation [Lord]
 Which greets us now from heaven
 Be kept a sacred record,
 And on our hearts be graven.⁵⁹

This was not the first time Goodwin had experimented with writing a battle hymn. A year earlier he, along with two other Independents (Vavasor Powell and one 'Mr Appletree'), published *Three Hymnes* (1650). These, as Barton and Wither had, commemorated the victory at Dunbar in the '*routing of the Scots army in Musleborough-field, by his Excellency the L. Gen. Cromwel*'.⁶⁰ The hymns were

⁵⁸ Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 46.

⁵⁹ John Goodwin, *Two hymns, or spirituall songs; sung in Mr. Goodwins congregation on Friday last being the 24. of Octob. 1651. Which was a day set apart by authority of Parliament for a solemn thanksgiving unto God by this nation, for that most wonderfull and happy successe of the English army under the conduct of his excellency the Lord General Cromwel over the Scottish forces at Worcester. Also a letter for satisfaction of some Presbyterian ministers, and others, who hold it unlawfull to give thanks for the shedding of blood* (London: 1651), p. 7.

⁶⁰ Mr Appletree, *Three hymnes, or certain excellent new Psalmes, composed by those three reverend, and learned divines. Mr. John Goodwin, Mr. Dasoser [sic] Powel, and Mr. Appletree. Sung in their respective congregations, at Stephens Coleman-streete, London, and at Mary Abchurch, on Thursday the 8. of*

apparently ‘*Sung in their respective congregations*’ in St Stephen’s Coleman Street, a noted enclave of the godly in London. Such hymn singing was clearly very popular and part of a growing trend among the Independent churches.⁶¹ Goodwin’s choice of similar subject matter for his hymn was not an act of competition, but rather assimilation, an understanding of the growing importance and relevance of battle hymns as acts of praise for victories won by Parliament.

Yet battle hymns like his had their opponents. In his later *Two Hymns*, Goodwin defended these songs to Presbyterians who had questioned whether it was ‘lawfull to rejoyce at the shedding of blood’.⁶² Goodwin agreed that the loss of any life was a ‘matter rather of sorrow then rejoycing’, but argued that when an enemy of God ‘become thus stubborn and wilfull’ towards his people ‘their destruction becomes a matter of joy and delight’.⁶³ He concluded that ‘solemn dayes of Thanksgiving for Victories obtained, are not only lawfull, but enjoyed as a duty’ within the scriptures.⁶⁴ In doing so, Goodwin had reinforced the biblical sanctity and necessity of singing battle hymns on such occasions. Independents like St Nicholas clearly shared these sentiments.

Parliamentarian Battle Hymns: Their Title, Type, Structure and Form

Close readings of his hymn in manuscript reveal how St Nicholas was not just influenced by, but was attempting to participate in, this scripturalist culture of printed battle hymns during 1640s–1650s. This can be seen in his imitation of the title, type, structure, form and content often employed in the battle hymns of other parliamentarian poets.

October, 1650. being a day set a part for the total routing of the Scots army in Musleborough-field, by his Excellency the L. Gen. Cromwel. Licensed according to order, and published for the general use and benefit of all the saints of Jesus Christ, in England, Scotland, and Ireland (London: 1650).

⁶¹ Cf., Alexander Griffith, *Strena Vavasoriensis... Mr. Vavasor Powell... His hymn sung in Christ-Church London* (London: 1654), p. 24; Christopher Feake, *Mr Feakes Hymne* (Christ’s Church: 11 Aug. 1653). This was also the practice of Independents in Ireland and on the Continent. ‘A Hymn sung in Dublin, Before Sermon’ was written when John Rogers’ congregation met in Christ Church Cathedral (Rogers, *Ohel or Bethshemesh*, pp. 91-92). Robert Baillie noted that ‘the greatest difference’ between them and Presbyterians was, ‘that the Independents of Arnheim did stop the mouths of all but one, who did sing the hymn which himself had composed, in the midst of the congregation for their edification’ (Robert Baillie, *A Dissuasive from the Errors of the time: wherein the tenets of the principal sects, especially of the Independents, are drawn together* (London: 1645), p. 119).

⁶² Goodwin, *Two hymns*, p. 1.

⁶³ Goodwin, *Two hymns*, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Goodwin, *Two hymns*, p. 2.

Firstly, when St Nicholas *titled* his poem a ‘Hymn’, he was joining Barton, Goodwin, R. P. and Wither in signalling a different kind of English praise from that which had gone before. The use of the word ‘hymn’ as a title distinguished their poetic works from the versifications of a ‘psalm’ and validated hymns as fit instruments of devotion. In doing so, English poets were beginning to comprehend the possibilities for vernacular hymns as distinct forms of praise outside of the Psalm canon. However, this was a fine balance. On the one hand, hymns had not yet developed to be fully independent of Davidic songs. This can be seen in how ‘psalms’ and ‘hymns’ were seen as synonymous during this period.⁶⁵ On the other hand, though battle hymns were indebted to biblical allusions contained within the Book of Psalms, they would not be mere paraphrases of them. Their form is best described as a scriptural collage, (something St Nicholas had experimented with in *For My Son*), which integrated the Psalms as well as other biblical songs in order to validate the hymn’s claim of divinely sanctioned triumph.⁶⁶ This distinction is important, for battle hymns were not, as Barton pointed out, an ‘unscriptural Psalm’, but instead served as biblically collated ‘Song[s] of Thanksgiving’.⁶⁷

Secondly, battle hymns represented a *type* of worship which was premised on Psalm 147.1-2: ‘Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God’. This is why both Barton and St Nicholas considered their hymns as ‘songs of praise’, Wither ‘*Songs, unto thy praise to sing*’, Goodwin ‘*A Song of Thanksgiving*’, and *Englands Memento* quoted Psalm 147 directly to declare that they ‘*sing praises unto our God*’ in

⁶⁵ The bishop of Lincoln William Barlow entitled his poems *Psalmes and Hymnes* (1613), George Wither’s *Preparation to the Psalter* (1619) declared his poetic offerings as ‘*A Psalm: A Song: A Hymne*’, Thomas Jackson saw some passages of Isaiah as being part of other ‘hymnes or Psalmes’ of the Bible in 1635, whilst the *English Annotations* (1645) described the psalms as a ‘varietie of Hymns’, Samuel Langley entitled his family prayers in 1649 as ‘*hymns or psalms*’, whilst Barton styled his in 1651 as ‘*Psalmes and hymns*’. Cf., William Barlow, *Psalmes and hymnes of praier and thanksgiving* (London: 1613); George Wither, *Preparation to the Psalter* (London: 1619), p. 54; John Downname, *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament... by the Joynt-Labour of Certain Learned Divines* (London: 1645), sig. XX.2; Thomas Jackson, *The humiliation of the Sonne of God* (London: 1635), p. 281; and Samuel Langley, *A catechisme shorter then the short catechisme* (London: 1649); William Barton, *Psalmes and hymns composed and fitted for the present occasion of publick thanks-giving* (London: 1651). Also cf., Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, p. 43, p. 45.

⁶⁶ The use of combining various passages from the Book of Psalms for devotional purposes was not novel. It had been used to make prayers in prose by various Tudor authors such as Elizabeth Tyrwhit and Thomas Cartwright as well as being employed by the Church of England’s BCP from 1564–1642. Cf., Felch, “‘Halff a Scrypture Woman’”, in *English Women*, ed. by White, pp. 149–152; T. C., *A Godly and Learned Sermon, upon the 91 Psalm*... (London: 1603), C8r-D2r; Natalie Mears, ‘Special Nationwide Worship and the Book of Common Prayer in England, Wales and Ireland, 1533–1642’, in *Worship and the Parish Church*, ed. by Mears and Ryrie, pp. 31–72 (pp. 38–39).

⁶⁷ Barton, *Psalmes and Hymns*, B3r, p. 13.

order to demonstrate how its hymn ‘shall be our song’ to the Lord.⁶⁸ Battle hymns directly referred to God in this way because as the minister Edward Marbury stated ‘this gift of holy Poetry is of and from himself [God]’, whereby such songs ‘should be consecrated in their use to him’.⁶⁹ The battle hymn in its *title* and *type* aimed to be an act of parliamentary piety. This was because, as the London clergyman Thomas Ford had argued, when it came to hymns and other spiritual songs, ‘Singing praises to God is an exercise becoming saints’.⁷⁰

Thirdly, *structurally* all battle hymns reminded their readers of their content’s contemporary relevance by being dated. These dates referred to the moment at which the hymns were themselves written, printed and sung, or to the day/s that battle/s took place. *Englands Memento* wrote its battle hymn to honour a host of military successes by Parliament, chief amongst them: ‘The great victory at *Edge-hill, Octob. 22. 1643*’ and the impressive ‘siege before *Yorke, 1644*’.⁷¹ It was printed in 1646 and, with its miniature of Thomas Fairfax ‘Captain General of the Army’ included beside its verses, was likely meant to coincide with a national Thanksgiving Day on 16 April 1646 to celebrate Fairfax’s victories in the South-West.⁷² Wither composed *The British Appeals* for Cromwell’s victory at Dunbar dating his composition as ‘Jan[ua]ry 30, 1650 [1651]’.⁷³ This was the very same day that a national Thanksgiving was to be held for this military victory.⁷⁴ The date of this Thanksgiving had much significance as it was the anniversary of Charles I’s execution.

Goodwin’s hymn was to celebrate Cromwell’s conquest at Worcester and was sung, as his work’s title makes clear, by his congregation ‘on *Friday last being the 24. of Octob. 1651*’.⁷⁵ This was also on the same day that a national Thanksgiving was held for this battle.⁷⁶ It was also the first time that special worship was ordered

⁶⁸ Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, p. 16; St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652’ (1653), line 6, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 44; Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 47; Goodwin, *Two Hymns*, p. 8; and R. P., *Englands Memento*, broadside.

⁶⁹ Edward Marbury, *A commentarie or exposition upon the prophetic of Habakkuk* (London: 1650), p. 10, mispaginated as p. 11.

⁷⁰ Ford, *Singing of Psalmes*, p. 143.

⁷¹ R. P., *Englands Memento*, broadside.

⁷² Mears, Raffe, Taylor, eds., *National Prayers*, I, pp. 460-461.

⁷³ Wither, *The British Appeals*, A2r.

⁷⁴ Mears, Raffe, Taylor, eds., *National Prayers*, I, pp. 559-560.

⁷⁵ Goodwin, *Two hymns, or spirituall songs; sung in Mr. Goodwins congregation on Friday last being the 24. of Octob. 1651. Which was a day set apart by authority of Parliament for a solemn thanksgiving unto God by this nation, for that most wonderfull and happy successe of the English army under the conduct of his excellency the Lord General Cromwel over the Scottish forces at Worcester*, title.

⁷⁶ Mears, Raffe, Taylor, eds., *National Prayers*, I, pp. 572-574.

simultaneously in all four nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland) by one uniform order for Thanksgiving.⁷⁷ Barton, like Goodwin, specifically dates his *Psalms and Hymns* as being written on the same day, 'October 24, 1651', to be used for the 'present occasion of publick thanks-giving' for Worcester.⁷⁸ Finally, St Nicholas dates his hymn in its title as the three days in which the fighting with the Dutch took place: 'February 18, 19, 20, 1652 [1653]'. Typographically his hymn's title directly echoed that of Parliament's printed order for a Day of Thanksgiving 'upon the late Engagement with the Dutch Fleet, on the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth days of *February* last'.⁷⁹ This day of celebration took place nearly two months after the battle, as it was held on 12 April 1653.⁸⁰

Thus, it is highly probable that all these poets wrote their battle hymns in response to Parliament's printed orders for Thanksgiving Days for these military victories.⁸¹ If this was the case, Wither, Barton and Goodwin had a month's notice to compose their hymns, whilst St Nicholas only had two weeks to write his.⁸² This gave our battle hymn poets enough time in order for their hymns to be read and publicly or privately sung on the ascribed days of celebration.

The dating of battle hymns was vital to their purpose as articles of political as well as religious devotion, as they were part of a tradition by the House of Commons of setting aside Thanksgiving Days for its military victories.⁸³ These compositions would have been of great interest to those parts of Britain that took part in these Thanksgiving Days. These celebrations were not just important to parliamentarians as exercises of

⁷⁷ Mears, Raffae, Taylor, eds., *National Prayers*, I, pp. 573.

⁷⁸ Barton, *Psalms and hymns composed and fitted for the present occasion of publick thanks-giving, October 24, 1651*, title.

⁷⁹ England and Wales, Parliament, *An order of Parliament for setting apart... a day of publique thanks-giving* (London: 1653).

⁸⁰ Mears, Raffae, Taylor, eds., *National Prayers*, I, pp. 588-589. The Order for this Thanksgiving Day was significant, as it was the last time an official order for special worship was sent during the 1650s. The Thanksgiving Days that followed were issued under 'Declarations', that suggested, but did not mandate, that they be kept. Mears explains that this was 'because he [Cromwell] did not believe in ordering people to pray' (Mears, Raffae, Taylor, eds., *National Prayers*, I, p. 1viii).

⁸¹ The only exception is R. P., whose battle hymn *Englands Memento* only provides the year and not the month of its publication. This makes it much harder to estimate which, if any, Thanksgiving Day it was intended for. I have suggested above which Thanksgiving Day it may have been printed for.

⁸² For the printed orders of Thanksgiving Days for Dunbar, Worcester and Portland, see respectively, Mears, Raffae, Taylor, eds., *National Prayers*, I, pp. 559-560, pp. 572-574, pp. 588-589.

⁸³ For a full list of Thanksgiving Days together with Humiliation Days from 1640-1653 see Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament*, pp. 237-254; Mears, Raffae, Taylor, eds., *National Prayers*, I, pp. 366-593. It is tempting to think what other battle hymns may have been composed for use on such days as these by other English poets which are now non-extant. Davies sees Thanksgiving Days as a practice, at least in principle, that originated with the early Brownists. Cf., Davies, *English Puritans*, p. 87.

worship and solidarity, but proved significant enough for the Royalists at the time to counter them with ones of their own – which often proved riotous with drink and fighting.⁸⁴

Fourthly, in term of their *form*, battle hymns employed ‘Grub- dialect’ – that is the less formal discourse of newsbooks which were often printed in and around Grub Street, London – in an attempt to popularise their content.⁸⁵ This can be seen in their use of abbreviations such as ‘’twas’ by both Wither and St Nicholas, ‘’tis’ by Barton, ‘when’t’ by *Englands Memento*, ‘Let’s’ by Goodwin, and ‘th’ used by all five poets.⁸⁶ By doing so, these hymns were imitating printed news which, as Nicholas Brownlees has shown, frequently employed abbreviations such as these to set themselves apart from other works in the press – in order to gain a wider readership.⁸⁷ Like newsbooks too, battle hymns included lexis that associated them with the contemporary coverage of war. Barton inserts ‘Bulwarks’ and ‘armed troops’; Goodwin ‘men of Arms’ and ‘bands’; Wither ‘Horse, money, Arms, and Plate’ and ‘Brigades’; St Nicholas ‘standard reared’ and ‘naval strength’.⁸⁸

As a result, these hymns were being deliberately expressed as public acts of worship, not internal ones of praise, to be read and sung by others. This was because battle hymns like St Nicholas’ were drawing on the reporting style of newsbooks in

⁸⁴ Cf., Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing*, pp. 139-140. This was part of a long history of mocking those who adhered zealously to Parliament’s Thanksgiving Days. Early critics such as Henry King ridiculed those like ‘H. Dod’, a ‘Tradesman of London’, for not ‘being content/To chant at home the Act of Parliament’ for a ‘publick [th]anksgi[v]ing’ in 1620, but instead having ‘Turn’d [it] out of reason into rhyme’ by writing new songs of worship for it (Henry King, ‘To my honourd friend Mr. George Sandys’, in *The Poems of Henry King*, ed. by Margaret Crum (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1965), pp. 89-92 (p. 90)). This was possibly in reference to Wither’s *Exercises upon the first Psalme Both in prose and verse* (1620). For a Royalist parody of parliamentary battle hymns, see ‘[A] Hymne to CROMWEL[L]’, in Anon, *A curse against Parliament-ale. With a blessing to the juncto; a thanksgiving to the councel of state; and psalm to Oliver* (London: 1649), pp. 7-8.

⁸⁵ The phrase ‘Grub-dialect’ can be found in Robert Ibbitson, *Mercurius Britannicus* 2-9/09/52 (London: 1652), p. 42.

⁸⁶ See respectively: Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 3, p. 4, p. 15, p. 17; St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652’ (1653), line 43, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 45; Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, p. 14; R. P. *Englands Memento*, broadside; and Goodwin, *Two Hymns*, p. 8. For the use of ‘th’ see Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 5, p. 21, p. 34, p. 38, p. 46; St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652’ (1653), lines 18, 22, 24, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 44; Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, p. 2, p. 5; Goodwin, *Two Hymns*, p. 11; and R. P. *Englands Memento*, broadside.

⁸⁷ Nicholas Brownlees, ‘Spoken Discourse in Early English Newspapers’, in *News Networks in Seventeenth-Century Britain and Europe*, ed. by Joad Raymond (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 67-84 (p. 69). This supports Neville Davies’ theory that St Nicholas’ battle hymn makes several allusions to the parliamentary newsbook *Mercurius Politicus* and its coverage of the sea battle with the Dutch. Cf., Davies, ‘Commentary’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 273-275.

⁸⁸ Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, p. 2, p. 15; Goodwin, *Two Hymns*, p. 8, p. 12; Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 22, p. 36; St Nicholas, ‘Hymn of Praise’, line 17, 32.

order to concisely relay and celebrate news of recent victories won by Parliament. This would have come as no surprise to saints because, as Wither had argued in his *British Appeals*, the hymn was seen as an apt vehicle for news:

These *Hymns* I offer up, to be instead
Of some short *Chronicle*, for them to read
Who have not means to get a *larger Book*,
Or leisure-time, long *Tracts* to overlook.⁸⁹

The ‘Heart-Work’ of Hymn Singing

St Nicholas’ imitation of the battle hymn’s title, type, structure, and form also extended to the *content* of his hymn. These can be in the scriptural cues that identify his manuscript hymn with these printed ones. This provides the clearest evidence that St Nicholas was influenced by these authors and their parliamentary battle hymns. Taken together, most of the biblical passages used in these hymns form a type of psalm collage (Psalm 34.3, 46.8, 57.8-9, 113.5, 115.1) whilst the rest are taken from biblical songs that celebrate the Israelites’ escape from Egyptian captivity (Exodus 15.1-21 and Exodus 18.11). Such groupings are incredibly inventive and rare. For it was not until Benjamin Payne’s *The Parish-Clerk’s Vade-Mecum*, first published in 1685, that certain groups of Psalms were ever officially assigned to be sung in English churches according to specific events (such as the ones our battle hymns were inspired by) such as ‘Deliverance from death and dangers’, ‘Prayer for aid’, ‘Tumults and uproars’, ‘Victory’ and so forth.⁹⁰ Therefore the selections of scriptures within battle hymns were entirely devised by their authors, and thus their repetition in St Nicholas’ work is the more remarkable.

To begin with, the opening of his battle hymn emulates those of Barton and Goodwin. These authors encourage saints to ‘see’ and ‘sing’ God’s praise. Where Barton reworks Psalm 46.8:

O, com behold and see

⁸⁹ Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 54.

⁹⁰ Benjamin Payne, *The parish-clerk’s vade mecum* (London: 1694), pp. 137-139.

what works the Lord brings forth!⁹¹

St Nicholas provides a more prosaic call to:

Come, saints, lift up your heads and see
What God hath lately done.⁹²

Where Goodwin begins with an invocation of Psalm 57.8-9:

Awake, awake, Let's all arise,
With loud voice let us Sing.⁹³

St Nicholas follows:

Awake your glories, up and sing,
Your loudest songs of praise⁹⁴

It appears, however, that such 'songs of praise' were only to be performed by the regenerate and elect. This is as St Nicholas shares Wither's anxiety that saints need to prepare themselves spiritually before celebrating God's deliverance from their enemies. Wither ponders whether some are not 'worthy to be heard of thee [God];/Because, our *hearts, eyes, ears, and tongues*,/Prophaned, and *untuned* be'.⁹⁵ Once suitable preparation had been made Wither then extols his readers to, 'Come, let our hearts, and tongues,/The Praise of God declare'.⁹⁶ St Nicholas, apparently equally concerned, advises those who sing his hymn to first 'Come... *Tune up* your hearts',

⁹¹ Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, p. 6. Psalm 46.8 reads: 'Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth'.

⁹² St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652' (1653), lines 1-2, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 44.

⁹³ Goodwin, *Two Hymns*, p. 8. Psalm 57.8-9 reads: 'Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations'.

⁹⁴ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652' (1653), lines 5-6, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 44.

⁹⁵ Wither, *Three Hymnes of Praise*, A4r, italics my emphasis.

⁹⁶ Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 47, p. 50.

whereby only then can they ‘make melody,/Sing praises’.⁹⁷ Other battle hymns take this purifying of the tongue and heart as implied, for example *Englands Memento*, which in presuming to address the saints alone extols, ‘Come, let us sing unto the Lord’.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, right from the outset these plural invocations of ‘our’, ‘your’, and ‘us’ are used to create a community of parliamentary singers in the hopes that each battle hymn is joining those of others.

Like Richard Baxter’s admiration of the ‘*Heart-work*’ of George Herbert’s hymns, the opening sentiments within these battle hymns echoed other parliamentary verse written during the Civil War. This poetry was just as concerned that singing to God must be with understanding, conviction, and sincerity rather than out of a sense of duty.⁹⁹ Nathaniel Homes, translating Latin verses by Augustine, wrote in 1644 that:

Soul vows, not ayrie voice,
Not Art, but heart God hears.¹⁰⁰

That same year Samuel Torshell, vicar of St Giles Cripplegate, echoed Herbert’s ‘A True Hymne’ (1633) when he stated that,

The finenesse which a Hymne or Psalme affords,
Is, when the soul unto the lines accords.¹⁰¹

Or, as a broadside entitled *An Embleme of the Times* (1647) put it,

The head and tongue, which so deceitfull are,

⁹⁷ St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652’ (1653), lines 1, 3-4, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 44, italics my emphasis. Compare to the Royalist conception of distinctly musical, rather than a cappella, ‘tuning’ when singing praise ‘With well-tun’d souls does make/a full harmonious Quire’ (Alexander Brome, ‘For the General’s Entertainment’, in *Poetry and Revolution*, ed. by Davidson, p. 424). Or, as John Fenwicke stated in his hymn, ‘With Tymbrels, Daunces, to our King./Sing out your skilfull notes... Tune up our strings to highest straine,/Which mortall creatures here attaine’ (John Fenwicke, *Zions ioy in her King, comming in his glory* (London: 1643), p. 94).

⁹⁸ R. P., *Englands Memento*, broadside.

⁹⁹ Richard Baxter, *Poetical Fragments* (London: 1681), A7v.

¹⁰⁰ Homes, *Gospel musick*, p. 20.

¹⁰¹ Samuel Torshell, *The hypocrite discovered and cured* (London: 1644), p. 103. Cf., George Herbert, ‘A True Hymne (1633)’, in *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. by F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), p. 168, lines 9-10.

Ye[t] [b]oth preferr'd, whilst hearts neglected are.¹⁰²

Ministers like John Angier complained in 1647 that in acts of worship many believers 'bring their bodies, but leave their hearts behind them'.¹⁰³ Concerns such as these were also practical when singing hymns. Ministers like Ford showed that 'it is not so comely, when in the Congregation some sing out of tune: but the greatest absurdity of all is when our hearts are not in tune', because 'to sing without grace in the heart is hypocrisie'.¹⁰⁴

This initial imperative to sing with the heart as well as the voice had two objectives. Firstly, battle hymns attempted to counter the set forms of worship previously employed to celebrate military victories within the BCP. As previously mentioned, the BCP contained a single prayer entitled 'A thanksgiving for peace and victory' said by rote.¹⁰⁵ Many found such set-prayers as ineffective forms of praise. Wither warned against those who 'formally may act a part' when singing hymns 'With little fervor, and without a *heart*' by mere 'exercises of the breath, and lungs'.¹⁰⁶ Instead he calls for his hymn readers and singers 'to expresse/A hearty, and unfained thankfulness' by contemplating the hymn's words first.¹⁰⁷ Secondly, it was part of a wider anxiety during the 1650s over whether hymns were being sung with spiritual integrity in mixed congregations.¹⁰⁸

This concern for fostering a holy community through worship is also evidenced by the battle hymn's use of the possessive pronoun within Psalm 113.5: 'Who is like unto the Lord *our* God'. This is because battle hymn poets were not only keen to stress

¹⁰² Anon, *An Embleme of the times, or, A seasonable exhortation drawn from the consideration of Gods gracious dealing with England* (London: 1647), broadside.

¹⁰³ John Angier, *An helpe to better hearts for better times indeavoured in severall sermons* (London: 1647), pp. 68-69.

¹⁰⁴ Ford, *Singing of Psalmes*, p. 38. For the continued importance of this in later dissenting hymns see John Coffey, 'Between Puritanism and Evangelicalism: Heart-work in Dissenting Communion Hymns, 1693-1709', in *Heart Religion: Evangelical Piety in England & Ireland, 1690-1850*, ed. by John Coffey (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016), pp. 29-42. Intriguingly, such sentiments were shared by Royalist poets like Henry Vaughan. In his poem 'Anguish' he writes, 'O! 'tis an easie thing/To write and sing;/But to write true, unfeigned verse/Is very hard' (Henry Vaughan, 'Anguish', in *Works*, ed. by L. C. Martin, p. 526).

¹⁰⁵ See above, footnote 41.

¹⁰⁶ Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 54.

¹⁰⁷ Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁸ Cf., George Whitehead, *Cain's Generation Discover'd* (London: 1655), p. 7; Christopher Atkinson, *Dauids enemies discovered* (London: 1655), p. 2; Cotton, *Singing of Psalmes*, p. 48. That being said, several decades later, dissenting ministers appeared untroubled about singing, or praying, in mixed meetings. As Oliver Heywood queried in his published treatise *A Family Altar*, 'What think you of poor ministers and prayers in mixed congregations? Certainly the presence of unworthy persons prejudiceth not the reception of sincere worshippers' (Oliver Heywood, *A family altar* (London: 1693), p. 45).

that God was on *their* side on the battlefield, but that the Almighty was also *their* God. St Nicholas' line 'This God, our God' closely echoes Barton's of 'This God 's our God', while *Englands Memento* has 'O God our God', and both Wither and Goodwin employ 'our God'.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, such cries mirrored those of pro-parliamentarian newsbooks at the time. During thanksgiving celebrations for victories on the battlefield these newsbooks frequently boomed Psalm 113.5: '*who is a God like unto our God*'.¹¹⁰ These evoked the earlier battle cry of the parliamentary soldiers at Naseby and several of their battle standards that rang 'God is with us'.¹¹¹ Except for Wither, who preferred the democratic address of 'peoples', this sense of parliamentary community was maintained in battle hymns whereby each poet explicitly addressed God's people as 'saints' – a favourite sobriquet amongst Roundheads.¹¹²

By contrast, Royalist battle verse manipulated the language of scripture to valorise an earthly rather than a heavenly vanquisher. Elizabeth Clarke has shown that Jane Cavendish's manuscript lyric, entitled 'On the 30th of June, to God', which discusses the short-lived victory of the Royalist forces at the Battle of Adwalton Moor (30 June 1643), was 'parodic and blasphemous' – as Jane sublimated God's agency with that of her father, William Cavendish, who led the King's army in the battle.¹¹³

Saviours and Sinners of the Battlefield

Once the solidarity of God's elect had been established (as fit vessels to sing these hymns), God's strength in battle was then invoked. While Wither demonstrated how God's victory over Charles I 'confess[ed] his Justice, with his Power', St Nicholas also sees in the battle against the Dutch how God demonstrated 'His power and justice both';

¹⁰⁹ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652' (1653), line 17, 21, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 44; Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, p. 3; R. P., *Englands Memento*, broadside; Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 2, 9, 29; and Goodwin, *Two Hymns*, p. 12.

¹¹⁰ Bernard Alsop, *Perfect Weekly Account*, 10-17/07/50 (London: 1650), p. 532; Robert Ibbitson, *Severall Proceedings in Parliament*, 13-20/03/51 (London: 1651), p. 1165; and John Hall, *Mercurius Politicus*, 30/09-7/10/52 (London: 1652), p. 1930.

¹¹¹ Cf., Martindale, *Life*, ed. by Parkinson, p. 37; Gentles, 'Iconography', in *Soldiers, Writers and Statesmen*, ed. by Gentles, Morrill, and Worden, p. 104.

¹¹² Hill, *The English Bible*, p. 12.

¹¹³ Elizabeth Clarke, 'The Garrisoned Muse: Women's Use of the Religious Lyric in the Civil War Period', in *The English Civil Wars in the Literary Imagination*, ed. by Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1999), pp. 130-143 (p. 136).

Englands Memento describes how the ‘Lord hath showne it selfe/in power gloriously’, whereas Barton has a syncopated version of ‘This God of power’.¹¹⁴

St Nicholas also imitates the battle hymn’s depiction of God’s power emanating from his sword. He describes how God ‘Did make his glittering sword draw near’ against the Dutch fleet; Wither sees victory on the Scottish fields as ‘This is the Day, whereon the Lord,/Did manumit us by the sword’; Barton states ‘For by that double-edged sword’ of God’s ‘thisemie they overthrew’ at Worcester; and Goodwin similarly ‘To these, a Sword he sends,/To execute his judgment just’.¹¹⁵

These battle hymns also had specific ways of representing their enemies and not just their saviours. They expressed the sin of their foes, and then their enemies’ role as sinners. The sin is often seen as pride and hubris, which is quickly humbled by God’s authority. This idea was drawn from a biblical passage where Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, celebrates the Israelites’ escape from Egypt by stating:

(Exodus 18.11) Now I know that the LORD *is* greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly *he was* above them.

Where St Nicholas writes:

wherein they waxed proud, the Lord
Above them was,¹¹⁶

Englands Memento similarly cries out:

For wherein they dealt proudly, him
above them they might see¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 22; St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652’ (1653), line 14, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 44; R. P., *Englands Memento*, broadside; and Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, p. 6.

¹¹⁵ St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652’ (1653), line 15, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 44; Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 49; Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, p. 12; and Goodwin, *Two Hymns*, p. 12.

¹¹⁶ St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652’ (1653), lines 37-38, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 45.

¹¹⁷ R. P., *Englands Memento*, broadside.

This in turn echoed John Vicars' earlier Civil War hymn to Parliament's military successes:

Wherein they *proudly dealt*, heavens glorious *King*,
Was admirably farre above them All.¹¹⁸

Whereas Wither characteristically employed more revolutionary rhetoric:

God look't through the cloud
 And, then, the Lowly, trampled on the Proud¹¹⁹

Goodwin is more prosaic:

The proud which did advance;
 The wicked he hath now brought low,¹²⁰

Finally, it is Barton who goes one step further to evoke the bloody execution of Charles I:

The Spirit of Princes (his proud foes)
 hee cut's it clean away¹²¹

This same passage from Exodus 18.11 was also quoted by a printed account by Parliament of the battle at Dunbar, 'in the thing wherein they dealt proudly, the Lord shewed himself to be above them'.¹²² Such biblical passages were also invoked by Cromwell who in a letter to the Speaker of the House of Commons in August 1648 announced the defeat of the Scottish army stating:

¹¹⁸ Vicars, *Englands Parliamentary Chronicle*, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 38.

¹²⁰ Goodwin, *Two Hymns*, p. 9.

¹²¹ Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, p. 5.

¹²² England and Wales, Parliament, *An act for setting apart Tuesday the eighth of October next, for a day of publique thanks-giving* (London: 1650), p. 1008.

Surely, Sir, this is nothing but the hand of God, and wherever anything in this world is exalted, or exalts itself, God will pull it down, for this is the day wherein he alone will be exalted.¹²³

The wide use of Exodus 18.11 to justify victory reveals how the same biblical passages were being used to cement the religious and political justness of the parliamentary cause in England. St Nicholas', and others', inclusion of Exodus 18.11 showed a knowing participation in a literary culture of using scripture to not just crown victory, but defend the need for the bloody fighting that had achieved it. Such repetition makes the content of these battle hymns more memorable and thus singable. The inclusion of Exodus 18.11 (which was itself a type of battle hymn), was an essential ingredient in persuading a godly community of the scriptural authority of singing hymns, but also of getting that community to see themselves properly represented within those hymns.

Having described their enemies' sin, battle hymns then moved to describe them as a sinner and a just object of God's wrath. This too was also taken from Exodus, but this time from Miriam and Moses' Sea Song (Exodus 15.1-21). In particular, battle hymn writers reiterated the song's emphasis on the 'glorious... power' of God's 'right hand' and the 'the greatness of... [his] arm' in defeating Pharaoh's army:

(Exodus 15.1, 4-6, 12, 16) Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea... Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea. The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone. Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy... Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, [and] the earth swallowed them... Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone;

¹²³ Qtd. in Helen Wilcox, 'Civil War Letters and Diaries', in *The Oxford Handbook of Literature and the English Revolution*, ed. by Knoppers, pp. 238-252 (p. 240).

Where Barton tells how God

in midst thereof hee spread,
And there let fall
His dreadful hand on Pharaoh, and
his servants all,¹²⁴

St Nicholas retains but switches the rhyme endings of 'fall' and 'all' whereby:

God
Appeared and scorned them all,
And with his mighty arm and rod
Like pharaohs made them fall.¹²⁵

Such imagery was made more elaborate by Wither who, in a rare instance of the Long Metre (8, 8, 8, 8), describes how God:

Ev'n so, from those, who fought our harm,
Thou broughtst us off, with out-stretch'd arm,
With signs and wonders manifold.
They so, were blinded, Lord, by thee,
[...]
In our own view, like *Pharaoh*, fell.¹²⁶

Whereas *Englands Memento* used a more literal reading of the Sea Song when it expressed:

In pieces Lord thy right hand hath
dashed the Enemy
[...]

¹²⁴ Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, pp. 8-9.

¹²⁵ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652' (1653), lines 33-36, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 45.

¹²⁶ Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 49.

horse and rider both
throwne downe together¹²⁷

St Nicholas may have been inspired to write a naval hymn from this biblical passage's use in one of Barton's earlier battle hymns. This was a hymn that had celebrated England's 'Sea-sight Victories' appended to his *Choice and Flower* collection of psalms and hymns in 1645.¹²⁸ For here St Nicholas would have instantly recognised Barton's use of the Miriam and Moses Sea Song to figure the enemy's defeat where: 'Proud Pharaohs charets, lo, he [God] downd,/And all his host in seas profound'.¹²⁹ Or St Nicholas may have heard ministers hark back to, and call for, this song to be sung, in several thanksgiving sermons of the 1640s and 1650s.¹³⁰ Either way, the song of deliverance contained in Exodus 15.1-21 was seen by these hymn writers as an apt typology for any oppressors of the saints and their need to sing of deliverance from them.

The Sea Song of Moses and Miriam

By including the Sea Song within their battle hymns such writers were also tapping into the historic victories of God's people that were seen as an ever-living reminder of the Almighty's power to save them. This is why many of our battle poets also prefaced their hymns by referencing this biblical song. Goodwin defends the appropriateness of his battle hymn as 'when the Lord drowned Pharaoh and all his Hoast: Moses and Meriam rejoyced and sung praises unto God'.¹³¹ Wither too introduces his battle hymns by arguing that Royalists 'have seen their late *King* (for continuing in his hardnesse of heart) like *Pharaoh*, drowned (as it were) in the *Red Sea*'.¹³² In the margins of his hymn, R. P. frequently referred to 'Exod. 15.1. etc' as the inspiration for his composition.¹³³ Even earlier battle poets like Vicars, as we have seen, also began his

¹²⁷ R. P., *Englands Memento*, broadside.

¹²⁸ William Barton, *The choice and flower of the old Psalms* (London: 1645), B1r-B2r.

¹²⁹ Barton, *Choice and Flower*, sig. B1r.

¹³⁰ Cf., Jeremiah Burroughs, *Sions joy* (London: 1641), p. 49; John Arrowsmith, *The covenant-avenging sword brandished* (London: 1643), p. 27; John Flower, *England's late miseries, mercies, and miscarriages* (London: 1651), p. 5, p. 7, p. 16.

¹³¹ Goodwin, *Two Hymns*, p. 2.

¹³² Wither, *The British Appeals*, A3r.

¹³³ R. P., *Englands Memento*, broadside.

Moreover, many clergymen who were defenders of the English hymn also reinforced the relevance of this scriptural song to be used as a model of praise during times of conflict. Homes, who was later followed by other ministers such as Ford, demanded to know, ‘How doe we celebrate a day of praise for deliverance, according to the scriptures, unlesse we have Psalmes and Hymnes of praise, as *Moses* had, *Exod.* 15’.¹³⁶ Cotton joined these sentiments declaring ‘surely the matter of *Moses Song*, (*Exod.* 15.) might justly yeeld fit matter for the like Doxology (or thankesgiving) upon the like occasion’ of a military victory.¹³⁷ Thomas Jackson declared that in the Bible ‘Poetical Hymns or son[g]s are the usual consequents of strange or wonderful events’ as demonstrated by ‘Gods wonders in the red Sea, [and] all his people (as if they had been baptized in a sacred Helicon) presently turn[ed] Poets, *Exod.* 15. 1’.¹³⁸

Not just clerical but lay writers within the parliamentary movement, attested to the appropriateness of this scriptural song to crown victories over their oppressors. Elizabeth Avery, whose husband's family may have served in the parliamentary army in Ireland, stated that 'Saints cannot sing *the Song of Moses and the Lamb*, until the Lord hath given a full deliverance to his Church'.¹³⁹ Not just doctrinally, but

¹³⁵ Vickers, *Englands Parliamentary Chronicle*, B2r. Composing the Sea Song of Moses was popular with at least one Presbyterian poet during the Civil War. Cf., Zacharie Boyd, *The garden of Zion* (Glasgow: 1644), pp. 393-397.

¹³⁷ Cotton, *Singing of Psalmes*, p. 27.

¹³⁸ Thomas Jackson, *A collection of the works of that holy man and profound divine, Thomas Jackson* (London: 1653), p. 43.

¹³⁹ Elizabeth Avery, *Scripture-prophecies opened which are to be accomplished in these last times* (London: 1647), p. 32. Avery's husband Timothy Avery, may have been related to Henry Avery who served in the army in Ireland between 1649 and 1654 and who was once thought to have been her husband. Avery was also related to the New England poetess Anne Bradstreet. Cf., Gillian Wright,

practically, early patristic writers like Eusebius thought that the original Hebrew of Moses and Miriam's Sea Song was written in 'Heroicall Metre' akin to 'tetrameters' – making the composing (not just the singing) of this biblical battle song entirely defensible.¹⁴⁰

Looking back, the Sea Song also recalled the Elizabethan battle songs of thanksgiving for the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Those like Roger Cotton, in reference to Exodus 15, defended his composition of celebratory verse at the defeat of the Catholic navy in that

where *Israel* past from yoke of *Egypt* land:
their ryder fell, and *Israel* skapt away,
and *Miriam* [with Moses] sung such prayse, as now we may.¹⁴¹

Looking forward, the Sea Song at the Red Sea was cited over and over as the key text justifying the composition of dissenting hymns after the Restoration.¹⁴²

Seen this way, when English battle hymns, and battle hymn writers like St Nicholas, cited the Sea Song in Exodus they were connecting themselves to the ancient and future Christian practice of versifying scripture as fit songs of praise during times of trouble or deliverance.

With One Consent

Despite their vim and vitriol, battle hymns of the 1640s–1650s always sought to heal rather than fuel denominational and political divisions. Though these songs glorified war, their aim was to enjoy the peace that came after it. For with peace came God's intended union through community. This was an early sentiment expressed by parliamentarian battle poets. As *Eben Ezer* (1643) pleaded, a thanksgiving poem that celebrated the defence of Bristol against Prince Rupert's forces, 'O *Prince of Peace*, let

Producing Women's Poetry, 1600–1730: Text and Paratext, Manuscript and Print (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), pp. 66–70.

¹⁴⁰ Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, p. 40.

¹⁴¹ Roger Cotton, *A Spirituall Song* (London: 1596), p. 3.

¹⁴² Cf., Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent*, pp. 215–216. David Jasper also finds traces of this biblical song as far forward as the imperial hymn of Rudyard Kipling, 'God of our fathers, known of old, / Lord of our far-flung battle-line' (1897) (David Jasper, 'The Bible', in *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, ed. by Kate McLoughlin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), pp. 61–70 (p. 61)).

it not seeme too great,/That *Prince* and *Peeres*, and *Peoples* hearts may meet,/And all in
unity and *peace* as one'.¹⁴³

Similarly, battle hymns often concluded by stressing the harmony of worship expressed in Psalm 34.3: 'O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together'. Where St Nicholas exclaims:

O then let us with one consent
Lift up our voice and say,
'Twas God, 'twas God alone who sent
Deliverance in that day.¹⁴⁴

Englands Memento equally cries:

Come let us magnifie the Lord,
and let us every one
Exalt his Name together.¹⁴⁵

Whereas Barton proclaims this more majestically:

Wee give thee thanks with one consent,
O Lord our God OMNIPOTENT.¹⁴⁶

Wither, as always, is careful to observe that such unity must be achieved through social equality:

Let all men do the same,
Of whatsoe're degree;
And magnifie his Name.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ T. P., *Eben Ezer*, as a thankfull remembrance of Gods great goodnesse unto the city of Bristoll in preserving them from the forces of Prince Rupert without, and a treacherous plot within, to betray the city to them the seventh day of March 1642 (London: 1643), broadside.

¹⁴⁴ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652' (1653), lines 41-44, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 45.

¹⁴⁵ R. P., *Englands Memento*, broadside.

¹⁴⁶ Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁷ Wither, *The British Appeals*, pp. 52-53.

Through their mutual use of the battle hymn's title, type, structure, form and content these parliamentary battle poets were confident that their songs would enable even a single solitary voice to join that of many others, just as many voices crying out would become one. In contributing to these cries, St Nicholas' battle hymn had connected with a scripturalist literary community that had sought to create, popularise and sustain new and shared songs of English praise.

The Debt to Wither

St Nicholas also drew some of his most vivid imagery from one of these works in particular – Wither's battle hymn in *The British Appeals* (1651). This is worth examining because it reveals just how influential Wither, a poet in whom not enough academic interest is shown, really was.¹⁴⁸ To begin with, both St Nicholas and Wither describe the nation's foes as figured in 1 Samuel 17.37, 'The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion'.¹⁴⁹ Here Wither represents England's deliverance from the Scottish army as one from a fierce predator:

For, by the *Pa*[w]
You may conceive, what *Lyon* I could draw¹⁵⁰

Whilst St Nicholas states how in the English Channel God for England had:

from the paws
Of th' [Dutch] lion rescue[d].¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ There has yet to be a monograph on this prolific poet and pamphleteer. One is very much needed as current examinations of his poetry do not attempt to connect his pre- and post-Restoration verses. Cf., Stephen Bardle, *The Literary Underground in the 1660s: Andrew Marvell, George Wither, Ralph Wallis, and the World of Restoration Satire and Pamphleteering* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), pp. 12-36, pp. 78-92; David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), pp. 140-158; James Doelman, 'George Wither, the Stationers Company and the English Psalter', *Studies in Philology*, 90.1 (Winter 1993), pp. 74-82.

¹⁴⁹ The same biblical image was also used in parliamentary sermons of the 1650s. Cf., Flower, *England's late miseries, mercies, and miscarriages*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁵⁰ Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 10.

¹⁵¹ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652' (1653), lines 21-22, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 44.

Similarly, both poets reiterate the demonic nature of their belligerent foe by using imagery from Job 41.4, 'Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook'. Wither depicts God punishing the Catholic elements of the Scottish army:

[He] cast on that *Leviathan of Rome*,
 [A] *Chain*; and, Fastned in his Nostrils too,
 [A] *Hook* which hinders what he fain would do.¹⁵²

St Nicholas depicts how the Almighty had punished the navy of the religiously pluralistic Dutch Republic:

This God, our God, who from the paws
 Of th' lion rescue can,
 Hath put his hook into the jaws
 Of th' Dutch leviathan.¹⁵³

Wither and St Nicholas use *anaphora* – that is the 'repetition of the same word or phrase in several successive clauses' (OED), in this case 'A' and 'Of' respectively – to reinforce how divine intervention had swayed the outcome of the battle.¹⁵⁴ Both poets also demonstrate the *Non nobis*, or cry of humility, taken from the opening of Psalm 115. Wither states that the victory 'was, Gods work (not our[s])', whilst St Nicholas says deliverance was due 'not to us, Lord, not to us'.¹⁵⁵

Moreover, both St Nicholas and Wither end their battle hymns with the close of the *Pater Noster* (taken from Matthew 6.10). Where Wither has 'Gods will be done', St Nicholas concludes 'Lord, so be it done'.¹⁵⁶ Other battle hymn poets like Goodwin also

¹⁵² Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 39.

¹⁵³ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652' (1653), lines 21-24, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 44.

¹⁵⁴ l.a., 'anaphora, n.', *OED*, online edn, 2014.

¹⁵⁵ Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 22; St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652' (1653), line 45, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 45. Such avowals may have also been inspired by their frequent use in prose chronicles of the Civil War. Cf., Vicars, *Englands Parliamentary Chronicle*, p. 208; Josiah Ricraft, *The civill warres of England* (London: 1649), B2v; Waller, 'Recollections', p. 126.

¹⁵⁶ Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 64; St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652' (1653), line 52, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 45. Similar sentiments were also recorded in England and Wales, Parliament, *An act for setting apart Tuesday the eighth of October next, for a day of publique thanks-giving* (London: 1650), p. 1001.

finish with a declarative prayer: 'Him will we love, Him will we serve', whilst Barton ends 'Amen', and *Englands Memento* with an ejaculation, 'Halleluiah'.¹⁵⁷ Such verbal acts concur with the readings of those such as Lewalski and Smith who saw hymns during the seventeenth century as types of prayers.¹⁵⁸

It is unsurprising that St Nicholas should be inspired by Wither's hymns as, apart from Barton, he was unquestionably the father of this form. The various prefaces to his printed hymns frequently discuss the practical, not just the theological, importance of hymns as serious articles of devotion.¹⁵⁹ Wither's poetic style which had a 'plain Country-honesty', as Baxter put it, would have appealed to men like St Nicholas.¹⁶⁰ For he, like many of his religious ilk, thought of himself as a 'plain country man' and of his verse as a 'plain, homely mode'.¹⁶¹ He would have also known of Wither's work from his initially popular verse psalter *Hymnes and Songs of the Church* (1623). This would have no doubt made hymn singing an official part of church worship in England, but for the fact that its royal patent to be printed with the English Psalter was revoked and his work became bogged down in legal disputes with the Stationers' Company.¹⁶²

It is in Wither too that St Nicholas and other religious poets found the epitome of the battle hymn's potential for addressing a 'godly' community. Shuger says of Wither's hymnology that it 'imagines community on the commons of historical memory – the commons of a faith as well as a nation'.¹⁶³ These were ideals embedded within parliamentary battle hymns. St Nicholas is not surprised that like previous invaders 'England's great [Dutch] Behemoth' had failed to conquer 'the land/Of our nativity'.¹⁶⁴ Wither similarly points out in his hymn that it was inevitable that 'our *Foes* beget despaire,/Of their *designes*; and, those, to us, unite/In *praises*, who, in *Englands* peace,

¹⁵⁷ Goodwin, *Two Hymns*, p. 12; Barton, *Psalms and Hymns*, p. 13; and R. P., *Englands Memento*, broadside.

¹⁵⁸ Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, p. 261, p. 267.

¹⁵⁹ Cf., George Wither, *The Hymnes and Songs of the Church* (London: 1623), A2r-A3v; Wither, *Three Hymns*, A2-A3v; Wither, *The British Appeals*, A1r-A2r.

¹⁶⁰ Richard Baxter, *Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter*, ed. by N. H. Keeble and Geoffrey F. Nuttall, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), II, p. 1077.

¹⁶¹ Burton, *Diary*, ed. by Rutt, III, p. 579, qtd. in Davies, 'Commentary', in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 285; and St Nicholas, 'The Recreation of an Accountant... 1662' (1663), line 29, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 48.

¹⁶² Doelman, 'George Wither, the Stationers Company and the English Psalter', pp. 74-82.

¹⁶³ Debora Shuger, 'Literature and the Church', in *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. by David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 512-543 (p. 542).

¹⁶⁴ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652' (1653), lines 16, 27-28, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 44-45.

delight'.¹⁶⁵ For – just like the Protestant hymns used in the Low Countries, Switzerland, south Germany, and Moravia during the long Reformation – it was Wither's battle hymns more than any other that reinforced the important role of hymnody as a historic device of the saints in 'facilitating communication and exchange in troubled times'.¹⁶⁶

The Literary Culture of the First Anglo-Dutch War

Thus far we have examined St Nicholas' battle hymn in the light of other parliamentary hymns that celebrated victorious battles that took place during the Civil War and Interregnum. We also need to investigate whether there were any specific literary motifs he and other writers used to describe the First Anglo-Dutch War, because St Nicholas' hymn is specifically addressing a particular battle from that conflict. This will allow us to see the wartime context in which St Nicholas was writing, and the influences he drew upon in order to compose his battle hymn.

St Nicholas often remarks upon the sinful pride of the Dutch in his battle hymn. We have already seen how he invoked scripture to castigate them as the 'proud leviathan' who 'Like pharaoh' 'waxed proud' in their vain attempt to 'master all the ocean'.¹⁶⁷ The haughty character of the Dutch appears even more marked in St Nicholas' Latin *octasticon* – or eight-lined poem – entitled 'In Prelium Illud Navale Inter Classes Anglorum Et Batavorum, Feb 18, 19, 20, 1652' (1653); which when translated reads: 'On the Naval Battle between the Fleets of the English and of the Dutch, Feb 18, 19, 20, 1652' (1653). The *octasticon* appears directly after his battle hymn in his manuscript miscellany, and like that hymn was written to commemorate the same successful sea battle against the Dutch off the coast of Portland in early 1653. In it St Nicholas derides the Dutch nation as 'ungrateful' ('ingrata') and 'puffed up' ('tumefacta videtur').¹⁶⁸ They were defeated, he asserts, because God 'scorns the proud' ('spernitque superbos') and has punished their 'wicked pride with his wonderful and terrible hand' ('Desuper imposuit fraenum fastumque nefandum/Faedavit, mira,

¹⁶⁵ Wither, *The British Appeals*, p. 50.

¹⁶⁶ Alexander J. Fisher, 'Music and Religious Change', in *The Cambridge History of Christianity Volume 6 Reform and Expansion 1500–1660*, ed. by R. Po-chia Hsia, 9 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), VI, pp. 386–405 (p. 397).

¹⁶⁷ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652' (1653), lines 29, 36, 37, 31, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 44–45.

¹⁶⁸ St Nicholas, 'In Prelium Illud Navale Inter Classes Anglorum Et Batavorum, Feb 18, 19, 20, 1652' (1653), lines 6, 7, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 46.

terribilique manu').¹⁶⁹ These criticisms were steeped in the anti-Dutch railings of the English press during the 1650s.

As Steven C. A. Pincus has shown, by the time of the First Anglo-Dutch War the stereotype of the Dutch as full of 'domineering pride' had become commonplace.¹⁷⁰ Their riches from trading had made them so. 'We are high, blown up with wealth,' observed a caricature of a Dutch correspondent in *Mercurius Politicus* in February 1652.¹⁷¹ The anonymous lampoon *Amsterdam and her other Hollander Sisters put out to Sea* (1652) described the Dutch as drunkards whose wine 'puffs them up' whereby they 'brag' and are 'proud of any thing'.¹⁷² The divine retribution against Dutch pride, depicted by battle hymns like St Nicholas', fulfilled prognostications made by several English almanacks. 'Thou growest proud, and hast forgotten thy God,' the popular almanac writer Nicholas Culpeper warned the Dutch in November 1651, 'mindest thy self; thy God knows how to bring thee poor again'.¹⁷³ William Lilly was equally ominous when he wrote in 1653 'the vengeance of Almighty God is ready to be poured forth upon the Dutch', whereby the English would 'be a scourge unto the Dutch, for their pride'.¹⁷⁴ Andrew Marvell also tied his poem 'The Character of Holland' (1653) to such predictions. This was composed in late February–early March 1653, and, according to Nigel Smith, was probably aimed at commemorating the Three Days Battle – the same sea victory St Nicholas' battle hymn was celebrating.¹⁷⁵ In this poem, Marvell insisted that the Dutch had lost to the 'infant Hercules' of England because of their pride. Marvell emphasized this through the repetition of the words he used to describe the Hollanders – such as 'vain' and 'vainly'.¹⁷⁶ St Nicholas' epithet of the

¹⁶⁹ St Nicholas, 'In Prelium Illud Navale... 1652' (1653), lines 9, 11-12, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 46.

¹⁷⁰ Much of what follows can be found in Steven C.A. Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism: Ideologies and the Making of English Foreign Policy, 1650–1668* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), pp. 61-62.

¹⁷¹ Qtd. in Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism*, p. 61.

¹⁷² Anon, *Amsterdam and her other Hollander sisters put out to sea* (London: 1652), p. 5.

¹⁷³ Qtd. in Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism*, p. 61.

¹⁷⁴ William Lilly, *Merlini Anglici Ephemeris* (London: 1653), A4r.

¹⁷⁵ Cf., Andrew Marvell, 'The Character of Holland (1653)', in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. by Nigel Smith (Harlow: Longman, 2003), p. 246. In other respects, Marvell's poem is dissimilar to St Nicholas' battle hymn. Marvell's naval imagery is far more classical than biblical, and avoids the 'sing-along' standard common metre employed by St Nicholas. Marvell wrote this poem seeking patronage from the Commonwealth government, St Nicholas already worked for them.

¹⁷⁶ Marvell, 'The Character of Holland (1653)', in *Poems*, ed. by Smith, pp. 255-256. Also see Owen Felltham, *A brief character of the Low-Countries* (London: 1652), p. 14. Intriguingly, when the first 100 lines of Marvell's 'The Character of Holland' was printed for the first time in 1665 – the whole text was only printed in 1681 – the concluding 52 lines of the original 1653 composition were revised and substituted for a new eight-line conclusion celebrating the Duke of York's naval victory over the Dutch at Lowestoft (1665). Martin Dzelzainis argues that this revision was made by Marvell himself and shows

Dutch as a ‘proud leviathan’ was, thus, not just biblically inspired by its use in previous parliamentary battle hymns. It spoke directly to the national prejudices of the English during the First Anglo-Dutch War about the solipsistic Hollanders.

St Nicholas’ figuring in his Latin *octasticon* of how the Dutch ‘roar like lions’ (‘leonino rugiunt’) in their hopes to conquer England; and in his vernacular battle hymn how God had delivered the nation ‘from the paws/Of th’[Dutch] lion’, both remarks based on 1 Samuel 17.37, were also culturally significant and specific to the war with Holland.¹⁷⁷ Proverbially, this echoed various printed ballads and news reports that mocked the Dutch as the ‘Belgick Lyon’.¹⁷⁸ The balladeer of *A Serious Expostulation of an English Souldier with the Dutch* (1652) assured his readers that Englishmen had nothing to fear from their enemy across the Channel, as

To thinke that wee should a dead Lyon feare.
Or else for t’heare thy *Belgick* Lyon rore.¹⁷⁹

In March 1653, the newsbook *Mercurius Politicus* commemorated the naval victory of the Three Days Battle against the Dutch – the very same battle that St Nicholas’ Latin *octasticon* and English battle hymn had praised – with a laudatory poem. Its opening heroic couplets rang:

Whenas the *Belgick Lyoness* began
To roar within the British Ocean,
[...]
A horrid Dinn out of her thundring Jawes
She sent; the Beast was known too by her Pawes.¹⁸⁰

the pliability of English battle verse. Dzelzainis’ contention is that Marvell converted a ‘poem celebrating the naval prowess of the English republic’ into a ‘craven exercise in royalist propaganda’ (Martin Dzelzainis, ‘Marvell and the Dutch in 1665’, in *A Concise Companion to the Study of Manuscripts, Printed Books, and the Production of Early Modern Texts: A Festschrift for Gordon Campbell*, ed. by Edward Jones (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2015), pp. 249-265 (p. 249)).

¹⁷⁷ St Nicholas, ‘In Prelium Illud Navale... 1652’ (1653), line 3, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 46.

¹⁷⁸ Cf., Anon, *The common-wealths great ship commonly called the Sovereigne of the Seas* (London: 1653), p. 26; Robert Ibbitson, *Mercurius Britannicus*, 2-9/09/52 (London: 1652), p. 40.

¹⁷⁹ J. W., *Brandy-wine, in the Hollanders ingratitude. Being a serious expostulation of an English souldier with the Dutch* (London: 1652), p. 3.

¹⁸⁰ John Hall, *Mercurius Politicus*, 10-17/03/53 (London: 1653), p. 2297.

Visually, the image of a ‘Lion’s Paw’ was used to inculcate anti-Dutch feeling that went right to the heart of the naval conflict. This appeared in the broadside *Dr. Dorislawes Ghost* (1652) whose imagery presented a political reading of the ‘paw of the lion’ in 1 Samuel 17.37 (Figure 8). In the centre of the print was a woodcut illustration of an avaricious Dutchman set against a vulnerable virgin. The Dutchman’s pendant represented a ‘Lion’s Paw’ obscuring the sun.¹⁸¹ This signified through *paranomasia* – or word play – the efforts of Lord Adrian Pauw, Dutch ambassador extraordinary, to obscure the truth of the Dutch naval attack on the English in the Downs. This affray had started the First Anglo-Dutch War whereby the Hollanders had fired the first shot and Pauw had been unwilling to admit it. On 19 May 1652 the English and Dutch Admirals, both supported by newly reinforced fleets, faced each other in the Downs. When Admiral Blake saluted the Dutch Admiral Van Tromp in the customary manner, requesting the usual striking of the topsail in deference to English sovereignty, ‘Van Tromp saluted with a broad side’. Lord Pauw was not willing to admit this provocation and war was announced less than a month later.¹⁸²

Thus, we can see how St Nicholas’ image of the ‘paws/Of th’[Dutch] lion’ carried both biblical and political significance. It was reminiscent of how previous enemies of England had been figured as ‘roaming lions’, but it also had particular resonance in the wartime polemics that were written against the Dutch.

Conclusion

St Nicholas’ verse demonstrates that there was a vibrant culture of English hymn writing during the Civil War and Commonwealth. Such creations, and St Nicholas’ contribution to them, reveal much about the religious, literary and political aspirations that many parliamentary poets had for these songs as their ‘loudest songs of praise’.¹⁸³ Where their religion was concerned, the existence of these hymns did not reveal English Protestants as abandoning Calvinism in favour of Lutheran modes of worship. Whereas Luther included hymns for singing that were not based solely on scripture,

¹⁸¹ Anon, *Dr. Dorislawes Ghost, Presented by Time to Unmask the Vizards of the Hollanders; And Discover the Lions Paw in the Face of the Sun, in this Juncture of Time* (London: 1652), broadside.

¹⁸² Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism*, pp. 69-70.

¹⁸³ St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652’ (1653), line 6, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 44.

Calvin approved only of sacred songs that were explicitly scripturally based.¹⁸⁴ Battle hymns by the use of a ‘psalm collage’ fit to sing, could boast of being directly inspired by scripture, just as psalters purported to be.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, Stanford Reid even calls Calvin’s paraphrased psalms ‘battle hymns’ in their own right. He sees them reflecting the religious conflict raging in Europe at the time.¹⁸⁶ Though Luther favoured songs sung to ‘musical instruments’, Calvin only approved of singing them ‘*a cappella*’.¹⁸⁷ Here again battle hymns did not conflict with Calvinist theology. These followed his

¹⁸⁷ Reid, 'Battle Hymns', p. 37.

prescriptions, for there is little evidence to suggest that they were ever set to instrumental music. Many theological works at the time felt that such noise would distract from and taint the singing of the saints.¹⁸⁸ The Calvinist distrust of music was also bred from archbishop William Laud's earlier re-introduction of organs and choirs in the 1630s which had so alienated the godly from the devotional practices of the Established Church in England.

The Calvinism of these hymns, however, was also distinctly English in the way their authors cultivated those views espoused by Britain's early hymn reformers. Though the intended singers of these songs were not as radical as Coverdale's Henrician ones (his hymns encompassed 'mynstrels', 'carters & plowmen', 'women', the 'courtyer', and the 'youth'), their intention to foster communal worship with vernacular hymns was the same.¹⁸⁹ Indeed Coverdale, like parliamentary battle hymn poets, had encouraged his readers to sing 'original, evangelical hymns in private and (perhaps eventually) public settings' long before Benjamin Keach's or Isaac Watts' hymns ever achieved this.¹⁹⁰ Battle hymns were, then, a part of the English hymn's revival that revealed how such acts of praise had come full circle.

This simultaneity of past and present hymn worship also played into the battle hymn's literary aims. Compositions like St Nicholas' allow us to see how the writing of battle hymns represented an acute sense of historic continuity which then became tinged with a fresh vitality. On the one hand, these war songs had to be written in such a way, as one newsbook put it in 1650, that they could 'be transmitted to Posterity, and forever recorded unto his [God's] Praise'.¹⁹¹ This is what God's people had always done and demonstrates why the Sea Song of Moses and Miriam continued to inspire Protestant writers of the hymn. On the other hand, battle hymns had to convey an immediate relevance to those who sang them whereby, as another newsbook reported in 1653, their singers were able to declare, 'The Lord... hath put a new song into our mouthes'.¹⁹² Battle hymns were 'ever new, and ever old' in that they relied on, but did not replicate,

¹⁸⁸ Cf., Robotham, *The whole booke of Solomons song*, p. 6; Mede, *Diatribae discourses on divers texts of Scripture*, p. 181, p. 180; Homes, *Gospel musick*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁹ Miles Coverdale, *Goostly psalmes and spirituall songes drawn out of the holy Scripture* (London: 1535), A2v-A3r.

¹⁹⁰ White, 'Women's Hymns in Mid-Sixteenth-Century England', p. 25.

¹⁹¹ Ibbitson, *Severall Proceedings in Parliament*, 12-19/09/50 (London: 1650), p. 756. This was also recorded in England and Wales, Parliament, *An act for setting apart Tuesday the eighth of October next, for a day of publique thanks-giving* (London: 1650), p. 1002.

¹⁹² John Hall, *Mercurius Politicus*, 3-10/03/53 (London: 1653), p. 2137.

scripture.¹⁹³ Their cohesion of biblical songs, ‘psalm collage’, and contemporary images, were intended to make them memorable yet applicable acts of praise. As Arthur Pollard has argued, this was a tricky procedure often encountered by later dissenting hymns who, in order to be successful, had to temper their desire for innovation with familiar images. This was because ‘novelty was here a distraction’ that would hamper the congregations’ continued singing of them.¹⁹⁴

This is not to say that the shared idioms of battle hymns could not have vastly different meanings for their singers. This was the beauty of hymn singing where the author’s and reader’s sentiments (individual or communal) could co-mingle without restraint. As Watson demonstrates, ‘the language of religion [i.e. the Bible] does not just deal in meanings, but – in conjunction with the reader – *makes* those meanings’ possible when a congregational hymn is sung.¹⁹⁵ Though the individual’s experience of singing these hymns is harder to chart, it is important not to see the similarities between battle hymns as an attempt at the kind of conformity in worship that some radical groups at the time were completely against.¹⁹⁶ Rather, as Coffey has demonstrated with the use of the Sea Song of Moses and Miriam in early modern texts, to writers and readers of the English Revolution their victories on the battlefield were part of ‘a continuous chain of divine deliverances linking the biblical past to contemporary history’.¹⁹⁷

It was this interpretive freedom that opponents of godly hymns railed against. Critics warned that such poetical works showed an undue authorship and authority in manipulating God’s Word to suit the writer’s own readings of unfolding events.¹⁹⁸ Such opposition had forgotten that the creation of *The Whole Booke of Psalmes* was as much a response to the Marian struggle as the composition of battle hymns was to the Cromwellian one. For any metrical rendering of scripture was bound to be open to the author’s and reader’s interpretation rather than serving as an exact copy of God’s Word.

¹⁹³ Ford, *Singing of Psalmes*, p. 121.

¹⁹⁴ Arthur Pollard, *English Hymns* (London: Longmans, 1960), p. 18.

¹⁹⁵ Watson, *The English Hymn*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁶ Cf., Robert Halley, *Lancashire: Its Puritanism and Nonconformity*, 2 vols (Manchester: Tubbs and Brook, 1869), II, pp. 1-140.

¹⁹⁷ John Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation: Deliverance Politics from John Calvin to Martin Luther King Jr* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016), p. 5.

¹⁹⁸ For the cautious approach to, and criticism of, poetical renderings of scripture see John Cotton and others, *The whole booke of Psalmes faithfully translated into English metre* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1640), **3v-**4r; Torshell, *The Hypocrite Discovered*, p. 103; Boyd, *The psalms of David in meeter*, *1r-A2r; Donald Davie, ed., *Psalms in English* (London: Harmondsworth, 1996), p. 112, p. 167.

As a result, the writing of hymns in England remained rooted in an identity that was happy to speak *with* scripture rather than simply *by* it.

St Nicholas' battle hymn also demonstrates the close relationship print and manuscript culture maintained during this period. Attitudes to manuscript and printed verse had dramatically altered during the Civil War, and this clearly continued into the Interregnum. Arthur F. Marotti has demonstrated that the religious and political associations of poetry within the manuscript system 'carried over into the medium of print' when lyric texts were read and imitated from one form to the other during the second half of the seventeenth century.¹⁹⁹ St Nicholas' battle hymn in manuscript, and the printed influences from which he drew to compose it, is continued proof of this.

Politically, battle hymns served as effective proofs of the legitimacy of Parliament's and Cromwell's cause, shoring up support from those who would otherwise question it. In short, such acts of praise loudly reminded its readers, singers, and listeners who had won the battles these hymns were celebrating and why. As articles of devotion, these hymns were not just religiously, but politically, successful. There is little evidence to suggest that they encountered any resistance from the Commonwealth regime. Indeed, why would they? Battle hymns were important to the Government because they reinforced Cromwell's logic of authority and rule. As John Wallace has pointed out, it was the Protector's 'categorical assertion that the victors had a just title to rule by right of providence'.²⁰⁰ Like Marvell's 'Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's return from Ireland' (1650), battle hymns were part of pro-Cromwellian verse during this period that described how 'advent'rous war/Urgèd his active star' by victories that could 'affirm his praises best'.²⁰¹

If battle hymns were often inspired by and dedicated to Cromwell's public conquests, hymns became closely associated with his personal deliverances. When Miles Sindercombe's attempt to assassinate Cromwell in 1657 was foiled, the Speaker addressed the Lord Protector in Whitehall suggesting that a hymn be composed: '*O Cantemus Canticum*: O come, let us sing a new song unto the Lord'.²⁰² This tendency

¹⁹⁹ Arthur F. Marotti, 'Manuscript, Print, and the Social History of the Lyric', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry, Donne to Marvell*, ed. by Thomas N. Corns (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), pp. 52-79 (pp. 70-71).

²⁰⁰ J. M. Wallace, 'The Engagement Controversy, 1649-1652: An Annotated List of Pamphlets', *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 68 (1964), pp. 384-405 (p. 385).

²⁰¹ Marvell, 'Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's return from Ireland', in *Poems*, ed. by Smith, p. 273, p. 277.

²⁰² The Speaker's precedent in calling for a new hymn of praise was taken from Psalm 98.1 of which he quotes, 'O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the Victory' (qtd. in Macaulay, *History of England*, V, p. 183). Also see

for godly verse to mark any significant occasion through a providential lens only increased after the Protector's death. When Cromwell died on the 3 September 1658 (the very same day of his previous victories at Dunbar and Worcester that these battle hymns had so loudly praised), elegies were quick to see it as a sign of divine endorsement for a job well done.²⁰³ Thus, this chapter has argued, like Barbara Ritter Dailey, that instead of seeing parliamentary piety as 'private and personal' during the Commonwealth, it is to be viewed as one in which 'piety is an expressive form of communication in the politics of social life'.²⁰⁴

Though the writing of English hymns continued throughout the seventeenth century, battle hymns do not appear again until after the Restoration.²⁰⁵ Except for the millenarians, (who continued to sing them in prison), the majority of religious groups only composed and sang hymns that supported war so that they could enjoy the peace that came after it.²⁰⁶ This is the reason why battle hymns were composed during the Civil War and Commonwealth. For though the aftermath of regicide had largely quelled the saints' domestic enemies during the 1640s, these were replaced with foreign foes in the 1650s. Yet, once an Anglo-Dutch peace treaty was signed in the spring of 1654 – and with it a hope that all fighting would end – such songs were no longer

Robert Burton (a pseudonym for Nathaniel Crouch), *The history of Oliver Cromwell* (London: 1692), p. 151.

²⁰³ Edward Holberton, *Poetry and the Cromwellian Protectorate: Culture, Politics, and Institutions* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), p. 183.

²⁰⁴ Barbara Ritter Dailey, 'The Visitation of Sarah Wight: Holy Carnival and the Revolution of the Saints in Civil War London', *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, 55.4 (December 1986), pp. 438-455 (p. 438).

²⁰⁵ For the continued publication of Protestant hymns in England see William Barton, *A Century Of select hymns* (London: 1659), *Six centuries of select hymns* (London: 1688); John Reeve, *Hymnes and Spiritual Songs* (London: 1682); Benjamin Keach, *The Banqueting-House, or, A Feast of Fat Things* (London: 1692); Joseph Stennett, *Hymns in commemoration of the sufferings of Our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ compos'd for the celebration of His Holy Supper* (London: 1697). The legacy of battle hymns can be seen in the later hymns produced by the post-Restoration dissenting community. Cf., Benjamin Keach, 'Distressed Sion Relieved' (1689), and Hercules Collins, 'The Marrow of Gospel History' (1696), in *English Nonconformist Poetry, 1660–1700*, ed. by George Southcombe, 3 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), III, pp. 112-116, pp. 161-166.

²⁰⁶ For millenarian (mostly Fifth Monarchist) opposition to English peace with the Dutch see Austin Woolrych, 'Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Saints', in *The English Civil War and After, 1642–1658*, ed. by R. H. Parry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 59-77 (p. 74). In 1654 imprisoned radical millenarians, amongst them John Rogers, were said to use 'selfe-made himmes' as part of their divine service in prison. Its lines gave it the verve of previous battle hymns: 'For God begins to honour us,/The saints are marching on;/The sword is sharpe, the arrows swift,/To destroy Babylon./Against the kingdome of the beast/Wee witnesses doe rise'. Its use of chiliastic imagery was explained in that 'the Antichrist, the Babilon, the greate dragon' was 'Oliver Cromwell at Whitehall, [who] must be puld downe' (qtd. in John Thurloe, *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe, Volume 3, December 1654 – August 1655*, ed. by Thomas Birch, 8 vols (London: 1742), III, pp. 136-137).

needed.²⁰⁷ The very aim that St Nicholas' battle hymn (and others) had in mind was irenic and helps explain why, to the best of my knowledge, battle hymns did not continue into the later years of Cromwell's Republic. For St Nicholas' hymn was confident that the victory it celebrated would affirm England, and not Holland, as 'master [of] all the ocean' through its 'naval strength'.²⁰⁸

So it came to pass that the triumphs of war finally brought the fruits of peace. To commemorate the Protector's cessation of hostilities with the Dutch the University of Oxford issued a collection of laudatory poems entitled *Musarum Oxoniensium Elaiophoria* (1654). In it those like John Locke transformed English ships, (that in St Nicholas' hymn had been God's instruments of destruction), into vessels of prosperous trade. In so doing Locke marked the end of the battle hymns sung during the early 1650s with the beginnings of a new era of praise – that of the Protectorate as a time of peace and plenty:

Our reunited Seas, like streams that grow
 Into one River doe the smoother flow:
 Where Ships no longer grapple, but like those,
 The loving Seamen in embraces close.
 We need no Fire-ships now, a nobler flame
 Of love doth us Protect, whereby our name
 Shall shine more glorious, a flame as pure
 As those of Heaven, and shall as long endure:²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ For details of the peace treaty see Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth*, III, pp. 67-71. Future naval engagements during (and after) the Protectorate tended to be versified with classical rather than biblical allusions. Cf., R. C., *An elegie on the death of the Right Honourable and most noble heroe, Robert Blake, late generall of the English fleet at sea* (London: 1657); Edmund Waller, 'Upon the Present War with Spain, and the First Victory Obtained at Sea (1658-9)', in *Poems &c. Written upon Several Occasions and to Several Persons* (8th edn., London: 1711), pp. 193-198; John Denham, *Directions to a painter for describing our naval business in imitation of Mr. Waller / being the last works of Sir John Denham* (London: 1667), pp. 14-41. This is concomitant to the shift, observed by Steven Pincus, that after the First Anglo-Dutch War 'people no longer believed that wars were won by the most godly or the most virtuous soldiers. Trade and economic vitality had become the key to political power and military might as well as domestic tranquillity' (Steven Pincus, 'From Holy Cause to Economic Interest: The Study of Population and the Intervention of the State', in *A Nation Transformed: England after the Restoration*, ed. by Alan Houston and Steven Pincus (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), pp. 272-298 (pp. 293-294)).

²⁰⁸ St Nicholas, 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652' (1653), lines 31-32, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 45.

²⁰⁹ Anon, *Musarum Oxoniensium elaiophoria* (Oxford: 1654), pp. 94-95. The optimism and triumphalism of these hymns would never quite be the same again. For though English hymns returned after the Restoration (as dissenting hymns) the singing of them was to only express isolation, anger and defeat.

Or, as the Commonwealth commissioner of trade Edmund Waller put it in his ‘Panegyrick to my Lord Protector’ (1655),

The Sea’s our own, and now all Nations greet
With bending Sayles each Vessel of our Fleet;
Your Power extends as farr as Winds can blowe,
Or swelling Sayles upon the Globe may goe.²¹⁰

The First Anglo-Dutch War may have ended in triumphalism, but it was during the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665–1667) that England would experience a series of devastating national calamities – not least the humiliating Dutch raid on the Medway in 1667.²¹¹ Less than a year earlier, in the dry heat of one Sunday morning in September, the cry of ‘fire, fire, fire’ rang out through the street of Eastcheap in London. The conflagration that followed would destroy a third of the city. The Great Fire of London in 1666 had, as Pepys recorded in his diary, occurred during a year already rife with ‘public wonder and mischief’.²¹² The cause and providence of the blaze was widely recorded and debated amongst the godly. It is St Nicholas’ interpretation of the Great Fire in verse, and the scripturalist literary culture from which it drew, that we turn to next.

The Act of Uniformity (1662) ensured that the hymns sung at dissenting meeting houses, because they were not ones contained in the BCP, were deemed heretical and illegal. As a result, the singing of dissenting hymns was often violently suppressed. Cf., Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent*, pp. 210-242; Clarke, *Dissenting Praise*, pp. 20-26.

²¹⁰ Edmund Waller, *A panegyrick to my Lord Protector by a gentleman that loves peace, union, and prosperity of the English nation* (London: 1655), p. 4.

²¹¹ Cf., Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism*, pp. 405-430.

²¹² Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: Volume VII, 1666*, ed. by Robert Latham and William Matthews, 10 vols (London: Harper, 2008), VII, p. 426.

SECTION III:
PROVIDENCE

CHAPTER FIVE

‘[W]e see the dismal, fatal scheme/Of Sodom and Gomorrah’: Scripture, The Great Fire of London, and Urban Fire Narratives in Seventeenth-Century England

Transcript of ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666: Upon The Burning of the City of London’ (1666)

Sept[ember] 2, 1666

*From Lord’s day, about two in the morning, till Thursday; began on the backside of the
Star on Fish Street Hill, at a baker’s in Pudding Lane, the wind high all the while at
north-east, and consumed all to ashes, from thence to Temple Church.*

IT was the voice of ’sixty-five to London:

‘Repent. repent, before thou be quite undone!’

Undone? Good Lord! Did last year’s plague foretell

God would so soon dash off the glittering L

From London’s name? Or are we in a dream,

And think we see the dismal, fatal scheme

Of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the flashes

That laid those cities in rude heaps and ashes?

Ah no! The just, the wonder-working God,

Finding we would not by the last year’s rod

Be got to waken, or at least to rise,

But were contracting fatal lethargies,

Has fired us broad awake, and made us see,

If not our sin, at least our misery.

Ah! for that prophet’s fountain now, that when

No showers from heav’n, no industry of men,

No water engines could prevail to stay

The domineering of the flames that day

(Our sins still imping of the wings o'the wind,
 And adding fury to the flames behind),
 But all must down, the pride of all the glory
 Must all be stained, to make so sad a story
 For future ages as by ink and pen
 Hath been transmitted to the sons of men,
 That yet, though we can give in no relief,
 And give but little other vent for grief
 When vessels are so full, in silence we
 May sit, and sigh out groans of sympathy,
 May Bochimize the place with tears, bedew it.
 Who knows? If God hereafter shall renew it,
 Our tears may fructify the soil, help bring
 Some hopeful crop after another spring.
 Who knows what phoenix, when this age is past,
 Out of these ashes may rise up at last?

Meanwhile, however, on this nobler part
 Of England's body, God hath laid the smart
 Of this fierce rod; yet every member is,
 Without dispute, deeply concerned in this.
 If once the vitals do consume that give
 That to the rest by which they are and live,
 Their blood and spirits (trade and commerce), then may
 The whole compositum soon pine away.
 And howsoe'er inquisitive we are
 To find what hands were devil-driv'n so far
 As viper-like to be the instruments
 On purpose to effect so sad events,
 And if 'twas brought about in such a way,
 The Lord discover it, that so they may
 Receive rewards of such iniquity
 As may breed terror to posterity.
 And time hath since, to the full satisfaction

Of seeing men, in this so foul an action
 Discovered who they were: the generation
 Of old Guy Fawkes, still count'nanced in this nation,
 The ancient boutefeus that ventured now
 To act above ground what he did below;
 Resolved, since *fiat lux* would hardly do it,
 That *fiat ignis* should be added to it.
 And sure, the judgment that on Korah fell,
 And on his complices i'the way to hell,
 Were a just guerdon; nay, th'infernal pit
 For such strange firers, if the Lord saw fit.
 Yet still we must conclude, whatever evil
 Is in this city, whether man or devil
 Be instrumental, God's hand still extends
 In ordering all to high and holy ends;
 And 'twill become us t'eye the hand of God
 More than the stone, and humbly kiss the rod.

O then that we could learn at length to spell,
 And put together, and read plain and well
 The voice that from this fiery mount doth come;
 Or that some Moses might be raised by whom
 We might be taught it, and at length grow wise,
 No longer suchlike teachings to despise.
 O that, when God so many ways hath tried,
 So many warnings given, such means applied
 To turn us to himself, and i'the last place
 Hath in this dreadful manner set his face
 Against the nation, and hath made us go
 From fire to fire, that hath devourèd so
 We might at length know him to be the Lord,
 And learn to fear and tremble at his word.
 'Tis true such judgments speak to him and her
 And everyone, for each hath had his share

Ezek. 15.7

In pulling of them down. May thou and I
 Lie low enough, and to ourselves apply
 This voice of God. Yet judgments, many times,
 That are more national, point most at crimes
 That are so too, which public persons best,
 Yea, only they may mend among the rest.

Speaks not this flaming rod to this effect? –
 ‘Hearken, O England, hearken, and reflect
 Upon thyself, even in this generation.
 Thou mayst remember what a reformation
 Thou didst engage unto, how solemnly
 With lifting up thy hands to God on high
 In church, and ev’rywhere: all should accord
 With the best rule, the sacred written word:
 Mad’st it be printed, publishèd, and be
 Kept on recórd for all posterity.
 And after thou hadst licked thy vomit up,
 And drunk new draughts of the old whorish cup,
 Didst thou not by the common hangman’s hand
 Burn that engagement, and, by thy command,
 Done ’twas in places of remark within
 That famous city. Might not this thy sin
 Provoke God to revenge in hottest ire
 The quarrel of his cov’nant thus, by fire?

‘How many burning lights of real worth,
 That th’everlasting gospel did hold forth,
 Hast thou put out, and didst, for want of bread
 Leave them and theirs like to be famishèd?
 Was it not just with God to fire out those
 That leapt into their seats, and them t’expose
 To like extremities, who, to their shames,
 Had no more pity than the furious flames?

'O England, how hast thou of late put on
 To out-mad Saul in persecution
 Of such poor harmless souls as fain would know
 What worship God would best accept, and how
 They might please him (though men displeasèd be),
 And live in peace and godly honesty!
 What snares and traps hast thou prepared for these!
 What hunting of them when their enemies please!
 What sport was it thy Sabbath days to spend
 In routing of their meetings, and to send
 Pastor and people, young and old, by shoals,
 To nasty, costly jails and dirty holes!
 Has not God justly now, by this sad stroke,
 Your civil and religious meetings broke.
 Yea, and your specious meeting places too,
 With all their pompous things, to let you know
 He doth not tie himself to such as these,
 For all their great supposed holiness?
 Now let your priests sit down and sadly ponder
 How good it is when God thus parts asunder
 Them and their people. See if private rooms
 Won't serve to worship God in when time comes.'

Cries not this fiery voice aloud also,
 'Hearken, O England, let my people go
 That they may serve me? Dost thou not yet know
 How near thou art to final overthrow?
 Break all their bonds, take off their yokes, recall
 Thy sharp edicts. Do it for one and all
 That in all civil thing obey the laws
 And serve their prince, pretend to nought that draws
 Them in the least aside from thence, but can
 In higher things serve only God, not man.
 Tell England's king these are most faithful to him.

Thin, chanting p[riest]s are those that will undo him:
 Those are the Achans. England never was,
 Nor will be quiet till at length it has
 Made them another pass, of millstone size,
 That once more down they may no more arise
 As to their power. Their sins, the Lord forgive;
 And for their persons, none will grutch they live.
 God has more plagues in store, if yet you shall
 Refuse to hear his voice, and still enthrall
 His Israel. They'll give you no molestation,
 But yet at length shall see the Lord's salvation.
 Set not yourselves against the Lord, for then
 You shall not prosper, O ye sons of men.

'And doth not hear, O England, what thy foes
 Collect abroad from these thy homespun woes?
 "We would have fired your ships", say they, "while we
 And you continue in this enmity.
 Ours might have done you mischief, but alas,
 Poor Schelling did not, but as harmless was
 As Margate or your other sea towns were,
 Which we could have, but did not fire, but fear.
 What got you by that private, sordid plunder,
 But made the world of neuters stand and wonder
 At such a Turkish and ignoble thing
 As stains your honour, and no good doth bring
 Unto the cause you fight for? Hath not God
 Now scourged you with your own merciless rod?
 Now God by fire has made your famous city
 A skeleton, for which you have our pity.'"

O that the Lord would open England's ears
 At these loud, sounding voices, that our tears
 Sown in these ashes might produce a crop

Of reformation that might put a stop
To sorer judgments, that this smart correction
Might at the length be sealed up with instruction,
That all this burning might consume our dross.
That's it alone that will repair our loss.
Thus, ploughing with God's heifer, might this nation
In this, or in some other generation,
Learn to unriddle Samson, and might say
(And that it may so be, let good men pray):
Out of this greedy eater, meat; and from
This strong affliction did much sweetness come.

This chapter examines St Nicholas' manuscript poem 'The Voice of the Rod, 1666: Upon the Burning of the City of London'. His remarks will be compared to the scriptures used by other authors who in their prose and verse accounts, in print and manuscript, also wrote about this historic inferno. Collectively, these writings reveal a shared set of biblical typologies and vocabularies employed by early modern writers to make sense of such tragedies.

Though writers employed the same biblical verses, they did so for different political and religious ends. Chroniclers revealed a host of potential scapegoats for the city's fire: from mad Catholics, to regicidal parliamentarians and fanatic dissenters, to persecutory Established Church divines. St Nicholas' poem was exceptional, however, in pointing initially to Charles II as culpable for the Great Fire, a charge he prudently dropped in revising his text. Despite these variances, dissenters like St Nicholas chose to invoke the very same scriptures in their accounts of the Great Fire as their conformist counterparts had done. This was to confute and indict their theological opponents using familiar scriptural ground. Taken together, these writings reveal a recognised biblical frame of reference for those who, as St Nicholas put it, chose to write 'by ink and pen' about the 'domineering of the flames that day' on 2 September 1666.¹

My intention is also to broaden my gaze beyond accounts written about the Great Fire of London. This reveals a much wider and shared literary paradigm of writing about urban fires in early modern England. It relied on scriptural incidents of city fires and the prophetic warnings concerning them. These ranged from the promised conflagrations to be inflicted on cities because of Sabbath-breakers; to the actual desolations that befell the city of Sodom, Jerusalem and the people of Korah, Dathan and Abiram; to the contrite tears of the prophet Jeremiah – which were seen as both signs of sincere repentance and requisite expressions to assuage further fiery judgements. The destruction or survival of churches during these fires was also used to justify who were the intended targets of God's wrath.

St Nicholas' 'Upon The Burning of the City of London' drew on this broader literary culture. His biblical images, similes and tropes linked his poem to a series of writings on other fire disasters – which I am calling 'urban fire narratives'. Scripture allowed these accounts to show the continual ire of God against the sins of the nation through fires that paralleled those of others not just geographically, but historically and

¹ St Nicholas, 'The Voice of the Rod, 1666', lines 23, 18, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 130.

providentially too. These writings reveal that there was far more that connected than divided pulpiteers and balladeers, conformers and dissenters, when moralising these horrific events. Thus, my chapter focuses on St Nicholas' manuscript poem as a valuable introduction to providential writings on urban conflagrations. In doing so, his poem, (and the Biblicism within it), is shown not to have been written in isolation, but in recognition of this pervasive literary mode.

The Historiography

John E. Morgan has recently pointed out that early modern 'urban fires' have attracted relatively 'scant attention', despite their contemporary ubiquity.² Most studies have tended to focus on the socio-economic impact of fires on English towns and cities. These tend to hone in on a single conflagration, or a series of them, within a local area. This is the case with Robert Bearman's article on 'Stratford's fires of 1594 and 1595'; John Wilson's article, 'The great fire of Wymondham 1615', and Peter Borsay's essay on 'A County Town in Transition: The Great Fire of Warwick, 1694'.³ Where scholars have taken a broader approach, few have attempted to tie these threads together, whereby their scope of interest only partially covers the seventeenth century.⁴ Morgan's article examines the 'experience of English urban fire disasters from 1580–1640', and Craig Spence's monograph on *Accidental and Violent Death in Early Modern London* covers fire fatalities from 1650–1750.⁵ By examining fire narratives of, and in, urban areas, within the seventeenth century, we can begin to comprehend important social, cultural and literary trends.

² John E. Morgan, 'The Representation and Experience of English Urban Fire Disasters, c.1580–1640', *Historical Research*, 89.244 (May 2016), pp. 268–293 (p. 268).

³ Robert Bearman, 'Stratford's fires of 1594 and 1595 revisited', *Midland Hist.*, xxv (January 2000), pp. 180–190; John Wilson, 'The Great Fire of Wymondham 1615', *The Annual: The Bulletin of the Norfolk Archaeol. and Hist.*

Research Group, x (2001), pp. 29–41; Peter Borsay, 'A County Town in Transition: The Great Fire of Warwick, 1694', in *Provincial Towns in Early Modern England and Ireland*, ed. by Peter Borsay & Lindsay Proudfoot (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), pp. 151–170. Also see Underdown, *Fire from Heaven*, pp. 1–6.

⁴ Scholarship on urban fires in the sixteenth century suffers from similar omissions. Cf., C. J. Kitching, 'Fire Disasters and Fire Relief in 16th-Century England: The Nantwich Fire of 1583', *Bull. Inst. Hist. Research*, liv (1981), pp. 171–187; Jeremy Lake, *The Great Fire of Nantwich* (Nantwich: Cheshire Shiva Publishers, 1983).

⁵ Cf., Morgan, 'English Urban Fire Disasters', passim; Craig Spence, *Accidents and Violent Death in Early Modern London, 1650–1750* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2016), pp. 66–78.

By contrast, there has been considerable work undertaken on the Great Fire of London.⁶ Literary discussions tend to focus on works by well-known authors. Marissa Greenberg's book *Metropolitan Tragedy: Genre, Justice, and the City in Early Modern England* has a chapter entitled, 'Noise, the Great Fire, and Milton's *Samson Agonistes*', and Erik Bond explores Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* (1667) in his article 'London's Great Fire and the Genres of Urban Destruction'.⁷ The diarised accounts of Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn are explored by Joseph Monteyne in his chapter on 'The "Picture of Troy": Mapping the Trauma of London's Fire in 1666' in his monograph *The Printed Image in Early Modern London*.⁸ By examining the works of minor poets like St Nicholas, alongside these familiar literary figures, we can begin to see how such writing was far more communal than individualistic in its expressions.

My investigation also contributes to our understanding of fires within the context of 'Providentialism' in early modern England. To date the most comprehensive work on this subject is Alexandra Walsham's monograph on *Providence in Early Modern England*.⁹ Here Walsham examines accounts of urban conflagrations alongside other disaster narratives.¹⁰ Equally influential is Keith Thomas' examination of the prevention against, and supposed cause of, domestic fires by witchcraft in his *Religion and the Decline of Magic*.¹¹ My research builds on both these works. I examine the scriptural parallelisms that occur in and between urban fire narratives, that are not discussed by either author. My work also fills the gap left behind by scholars who tend to prioritise the providence of other national atrocities, such as plague and famine, as

⁶ Cf., Walter George Bell, *The Great Fire of London in 1666* (London: Albion Press, 2016); Adrian Tinniswood, *By Permission of Heaven: The Story of the Great Fire of London* (Riverhead: Putnam, 2004); Neil Hanson, *The Great Fire of London: In That Apocalyptic Year, 1666* (London: Wiley, 2002); Stephen Porter, *The Great Fire of London* (Stroud: Sutton, 1996).

⁷ Marissa Greenberg, *Metropolitan Tragedy: Genre, Justice, and the City in Early Modern England* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2015), pp. 108-138; Erik Bond, 'Historicizing the "New Normal": London's Great Fire and the Genres of Urban Destruction', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 31.2 (Fall 2007), pp. 43-64. There is no room here to list the extensive scholarship on Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*. For an in-depth study, still cited today, that examines the poem's depiction of the Great Fire of London, see Michael McKeon, *Politics and Poetry in Restoration England: The Case of Dryden's Annus Mirabilis* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard UP, 1975), pp. 132-148.

⁸ Joseph Monteyne, *The Printed Image in Early Modern London: Urban Space, Visual Representation, and Social Exchange* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 113-154.

⁹ Walsham has further developed this topic in other works. Cf., Alexandra Walsham, 'Deciphering Divine Wrath and Displaying Godly Sorrow: Providentialism and Emotion in Early Modern England', in *Disaster, Death and the Emotions in the Shadow of the Apocalypse 1400-1700*, ed. by Jennifer Spinks and Charles Zika (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 21-43; Alexandra Walsham, 'Impolitic Pictures: Providence, History, and the Iconography of Protestant Nationhood in Early Stuart England', *Studies in Church History*, 33 (1997), pp. 307-328.

¹⁰ Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 117-124, pp. 137-138, pp. 155-156.

¹¹ Thomas, *Decline of Magic*, p. 28, p. 33-34, p. 38, p. 60, p. 85, pp. 605-606.

more prominent in the literary culture of seventeenth-century England.¹² Ultimately, my chapter contributes to the growing field of early modern ‘disaster studies’, and in particular to the under-investigated one of urban conflagrations.¹³

The Cultural Context

The hazards of fire were perennial in early modern England.¹⁴ As one pamphlet put it, ‘many poor souls have too often, been exposed to the merciless fury of fiery flames’.¹⁵ The dangers and fascinations with their destructive force came in many forms. Abroad and at home writers spoke of strange comets, billowing volcanoes, lightning storms, gaping earthquakes which spewed sulphurous plumes, furious hail, and forest fires.¹⁶

¹² Cf., Killeen, ‘Hezekiah, the politics of municipal plague and the London poor’, in *The Political Bible*, pp. 76–104; Ernest B. Gilman, *Plague Writing in Early Modern England* (Chicago, Ill.; London: University of Chicago Press, 2009); John Walter and Roger Schofield, eds., *Famine, Disease, and the Social Order in Early Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989).

¹³ For studies of urban fires in early modern Europe see Marie Luisa Allemeyer, *Fewersnoth und Flammenschwert: Stadtbrände in Der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007); Cornel Zwielerlein, *Der gezahmte Prometheus: Feuer und Sicherheit zwischen Früher Neuzeit und Moderne* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011); Greg Bankoff, Uwe Lübken, Jordan Sand, eds., *Flammable Cities: Urban Conflagration and the Making of the Modern World* (Madison: Wisconsin UP, 2012).

¹⁴ Cf., E. L. Jones, S. Porter and M. Turner, *A Gazetteer of English Urban Fire Disasters, 1500–1900* (Historical Geography Research Ser., xiii, 1984). The authors estimate that 172 urban fires (which destroyed ten or more houses) occurred during the period 1500–1750 (p. vi). This compared to the Bills of Mortality that record 383 persons killed by being ‘burnt’ between 1654–1735 (Spence, *Accidents and Violent Death*, p. 67). The chronicling of urban fires can be charted back to writings during the reign of William the Conqueror. Cf., William Thomas, *The countries sense of Londons sufferings in the last most lamentable fire* (London: 1667), B1r.

¹⁵ Anon, *A great and wonderful discovery, of the bloody villains, and inhumane murtherers, committed to Newgate and other places since that great and lamentable fire, at Mr. Delaun’s house in Loathbury* (London: 1663), p. 3. As William Gosling stated in his broadside, ‘Some hath been burnt by bad Harths, Chimnies, Ovens, or by pans of fire set upon boards: some by Cloaths hanged against the fire: some by leaving great fires in Chimnies, where the sparkes or sickles breaking fell and fired the boards, painted Cloaths, Wainscots, Rushes, Matts, as houses were burnt in *Shoreditch*: some by Powder, or shooting off Pieces: some by Tinder or Matches: some by setting Candles under shelves: some by leaving Candles neere their beds: some by snuffes of Candles, Tobacco-snuffes, burnt papers, and some by drunkards’ (William Gosling, *Seasonable advice, for preventing the mischiefe of fire, that may come by negligence, treason, or otherwise Ordered to be printed by the Lord Major of London* (London: 1643), broadside).

¹⁶ Cf., respectively: Anon, *Signes from heaven: or Severall apparitions seene and heard in the ayre, in the counties of Cambridge and Norfolke* (London: 1646); Anon, *A true and strange relation of fire, which by an eruption brake forth out of the bowels of the earth in the depth of the sea, and made an island of foure miles and a halfe in length* (London: 1639); Anon, *An Account of a strange and prodigious storm of thunder* (London: 1680); Anon, *Strange news from Oxfordshire being a true and faithful account of a wonderful and dreadful earthquake that happened in those parts* (London: 1683); Anon, *The dreadful and most prodigious tempest at Markfield at Leicestershire, on Thursday Septemb. 7 Where most wonderful stones of hail fell down* (London: 1653); Anon, *Strange news from Mile-end: or a full and true account* (London: 1684).

Yet urban fires were more common, and more often recorded, in seventeenth-century England.¹⁷ As one pamphlet argued, ‘Amongst the many Judgments where with God Almighty has been pleased to punish this Nation’ that of city ‘Fire[s] has been the severest’.¹⁸ As a result, several pamphlets, sermons, diaries, letters, ballads and newsbooks endeavoured to describe and dissect the causes of fires in cities, towns, streets, bridges, prisons, mills, households, palaces and ships.¹⁹ Fires also loomed large in the national consciousness. The commemoration of urban infernos was enshrined in annual Thanksgiving Days and fasts, in plays, pamphlets and sermons which frequently rehearsed these atrocities again and again, sometimes decades after they had occurred.²⁰

¹⁷ Cf., Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 127, p. 195, p. 199, p. 228, p. 243, p. 253, p. 304, passim; Newcome, *Autobiography*, ed. by Parkinson, I, p. 3, p. 31, p. 120, p. 160; Edward Maunde Thompson, ed., *Correspondence of the Family of Hatton*, 2 vols (London: 1878), I, p. 134, p. 171, p. 183; John Rous, *Diary of John Rous: Incumbent of Santon Downham, Suffolk, from 1625 to 1642*, ed. by Mary Anne Everett Green (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1856), p. 24, p. 61, p. 81; Roger North, ‘The Autobiography of the Hon. Roger North’, in *The Lives of the Right Hon. Francis North... Together with the Autobiography of the Author*, ed. by Roger North (1890), pp. 1-210 (pp. 37-44); Josselin, *Diary*, ed. by Macfarlane, p. 1, p. 15, p. 187, p. 473, p. 587.

¹⁸ Anon, *A True account of the dreadful fire which happened on Sunday the 19th of November, between ten and eleven at night in Wapping* (London: 1682), p. 1. Some towns were more blighted than others. When a ‘feirce & threatning’ fire broke out in Manchester on 9 May 1664, Henry Newcome remarked in his diary ‘How often hath ye L[or]d threatned us this way w[i]thin ysc 2 yeares’ (Newcome, *Autobiography*, ed. by Parkinson, I, p. 83). Stratford-upon-Avon suffered a series of fires in 1594, 1595, 1614, and 1641. Cf., Steven Porter, ‘Fires in Stratford-upon-Avon in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’, *Warwickshire History*, III (1975-8), pp. 97-106.

¹⁹ Cf., respectively, Anon, *An account of the late dreadful fire at Northampton* (London: 1675); John Cole, *A full and more particular account of the late fire with several losses at Newmarket* (London: 1689); Anon, *Sad and dreadful news from the Strand giving an account of a most dreadful fire which happen’d there last night and consum’d to ashes four persons* (London: 1698); Anon, *Londons affright... pittie, to all people that shall heare of it in [f]ull fire that hapned on London-Bridge* (London: 1633); Anon, *An Account of the fire at New-prison by Clerkenwel* (London: 1679); Anon, *Dreadful news from Hackney Marsh giving a true relation of the blowing up two powder mills* (London: 1690); Anon, *An account of a most inhumane and barbarous murder committed by one William Sherloge and his whore, upon the bodies of his own wife & child; and how he sett his house on fire* (London: 1700); Anon, *Great news from Kensington giving a particular relation of the late fire which happened in Their Majesties pallace on Wednesday the 11th* (London: 1691); Anon, *Sad newes from Black-wall being a true relation of the bloody designe of Simon Man... in which ship were burn’t fifty eight men* (London: 1641).

²⁰ A thanksgiving service for the religious reformation spurred after the terrible fire of Dorchester in 1613 was maintained annually for two decades (Underdown, *Fire from Heaven*, p. 93). A yearly fast day for the Great Fire of London continued for well over four decades. Cf., Jack Gilpin, ‘God’s Terrible Voice: Liturgical Response to the Great Fire of London’, *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 82.3 (September 2013), pp. 318-334. Not just communally, but individually, people often re-membered urban fires in their diaries. Philip Henry remarked in his diary on 5 March 1678 that, ‘This day was remembered the sad & lamentable fire at Wem which was about y^e time twelve-month, though it bee rising again out of its ashes, yet the burning of it sh^d not bee forgotten, esp. not the sin that kindled it’ (Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 274). Many pamphlets compared the town fires they described to those of others, thus keeping the legacy of these disasters alive. Cf., Andrew Parsons, *Seasonable counsel to an afflicted people* (London: 1677), p. 43. Stage-play re-enacted, with gruesome detail, famous urban conflagrations. Cf., Ellen MacKay, *Persecution, Plague, and Fire: Fugitive Histories of the Stage in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 139-164.

Whether in manuscript or print, prose or verse, urban fire narratives were written for several reasons. Firstly, accounts chronicled the fatalities caused by domestic oversight in the hopes of encouraging better household management. Here narratives were instructional and essential. 'So many and surprising have been the misfortunes of Landlords, and Masters of Families', one pamphleteer exclaimed, 'that they are equally engaged to a strict Inspection of their Workmen and Servants, that neither an ill plac'd Candle, or an unregarded Snuff of a Pipe of Tobacco, nor the careless Airing of Linnen is permitted', for, if unchecked, these 'should in one hour undo a family for ever'.²¹ Secondly, urban fire narratives chronicled the 'Fiering of Houses' where arson was used to destroy any evidence of theft.²² Nathanael Homes preached that it, 'hath beene found by experience, that a doore of an house being left unbolted, and tapers or candles left in a readinesse, they have beene easily lighted by pilferers to affright the inhabitants, and rob them'.²³ These tales were intended to be as monitory as they were foreboding.

Thirdly, 'plot monger' pamphleteers often blamed urban fires on the 'wicked designes' and 'damnable Plots' of papists during this period.²⁴ This was to stoke up anti-Catholic xenophobia, providing easy scapegoats for scorn, blame and ridicule. Fourthly, documents known as 'briefs', printed and read in churches, would recount urban fires in attempts to encourage charitable contributions to the towns that had suffered heavy economic losses by them.²⁵ Finally, such accounts were used to mark the providence of God. The hand of the Almighty was seen in 'Rapid Whirlwinds',

²¹ Anon, *A True account of that dreadful fire which happened in the house of Mr. Samuel Seaton, a pewterer* (London: 1687), p. 4.

²² Cf., Anon, *A strange and horrible relation of a bloody and inhumane murtherr committed... and then having robb'd them of what mony they had, set fire on the house* (London: 1674); Anon, *An Impartial account of the late discovery of the persons taken with fire-balls in Southwark* (London: 1688); Anon, *A hue and cry after Edward Kerby... Being a full and true account of the wicked robbery committed near St. Giles's Church, on Saturday last, at a joyners house in Plumb-tree-street, having first robbed the house of all movable goods, set if afterwards on fire* (London: 1700).

²³ Nathanael Homes, *The New world* (London: 1641), p. 31.

²⁴ Anon, *Bloody newes from Norwich or, a true relation of a bloody attempt of the papists in Norwich, to consume the whole city by fire* (London: 1641), A2r; William Bedloe, *A narrative and impartial discovery of the horrid Popish plot: carried on for the burning and destroying the cities of London and Westminster* (London: 1679), p. 2; Anon, *The Jesuites firing-plot revived* (London: 1680), p. 11; Anon, *A Full and true account of the sad and dreadful fire which happened in the borough of Southwark on the 22 of September, 1689... and the manner of seizing a notorious papist* (London: 1689), p. 3.

²⁵ These were often written by the reigning monarch at the time. Cf., James I, *James, by the grace of God... to all... whereas we are credibly certified ... that upon Saterday [sic] the nynth day of July [1614], there happened a sodaine and terrible fire within our towne of Stratford upon Avon* (London: 1616); Charles I, *To all parsons, vicars and curates, and also to all justices of the peace, majors, shreiffes, bailiffes, constables, church-wardens, headburroughs, and to all officers of cities, burroughs and townes corporate, and to all others, our officers, ministers, and subjects whatsoever they be,... that the upper town of Bridgnorth aforesaid, was set on fire* (London: 1648).

‘Routing Fires’, ‘Red Thunder-bolts’, and ‘loud Storms and Tempests’, whose ‘Prodigies and Portents’ were both omens of His wrath and signs of His mercy.²⁶ As the cosmopolitan poet John Tabor stated,

These were the sad disasters, which the ire
Of Heav’n did punish sinners with by fire.²⁷

Many of the intended purposes of fire narratives intersected and overlapped. Whatever their agenda, they all employed a recognisable scripturalism. This was to show that geographical or meteorological fires were not only divine signs of disfavour and punishment to sinners, but also opportunities for repentance and reconciliation to God.²⁸

The Bible lay at the heart of such disasters. Fires were the chastising judgements against the unregenerate and sinful. Tracts chronicling the fiery punishments meted out to sinners in their homes filled the press; their lurid woodcuts of burning or charred victims were accompanied by appropriate scriptural glosses.²⁹ Arsonists were commonly seen as ‘scorning and despising the Bible’.³⁰ When caught many were burned alive.³¹ Likewise victims of fires, particularly those of ‘self-

²⁶ Anon, *The Strange and dreadful relation of a horrible tempest of thunder and lightning and of strange apparitions in the air, accompanied with whirlwinds, gusts of hail and rain which happened on the tenth of this instant June, at a place near Wetherby in the County of York, with the account how the top of a strong oak... was taken off by a sheet of fire...* (London: 1680), pp. 1-2.

²⁷ John Tabor, *Seasonable thoughts in sad times being some reflections on the warre, the pestilence, and the burning of London* (London: 1667), p. 27. Accounts of the punishment of sinners by fire abound in accounts by the godly. Typical were those recorded by Oliver Heywood. He notes in his diary on 4 February 1680, ‘a stormy day of wind, hail, snow... [and] many terrible thunderclaps’, adding that a ‘woman spake profane words of the roaring thunder’, which ensured that ‘suddenly lightening seized on them, burnt part of the house, stntck her and two others of the family dumb, one dead since, and the others remain sad objects’ (Oliver Heywood, *The Rev. Oliver Heywood, B.A., 1630–1702; His Autobiography, [and] Diaries*, ed. by J. Horsfall Turner, 4 vols (Brighouse: A.B. Bayes, 1882), II, p. 269).

²⁸ When a fire raged through ‘St. Edmonds-Bury’ in Suffolk during the spring of 1608, one pamphleteer wrote, ‘God hath his secret love to man-kinde, and his severall punishments for sinne, which hee often times doth easily inflict uppon us to drawe us to amendment’ (Anon, *The woefull and lamentable wast and spoile done by a suddaine fire in S. Edmonds-bury in Suffolke* (London: 1608), A3r).

²⁹ Cf., Anon, *A true relation of [a] ... house was consumed with fire from heauen* (London: 1609); Anon, *Death’s master-peece: or, a true relation of that great and sudden fire in Towerstreet* (London: 1650); Anon, *Divine examples of God’s severe judgments upon Sabbath-breakers* (London: 1671).

³⁰ Committee to Enquire into the Burning of London, *London’s flames being an exact and impartial account of divers informations given in to the committee of Parliament* (London: 1679), p. 11.

³¹ Cf., Rous, *Diary*, ed. by Green, p. 61; Anon, *A strange and horrible relation of a bloody and inhumane murder commtted... and then having robb’d them of what mony they had, set fire on the house* (London: 1674), p. 2; Anon, *A... full and true account of the wicked robbery committed near St. Giles’s Church, on Saturday last, at a joyners house in Plumb-tree-street, having first robbed the house of all movable goods, set if afterwards on fire* (London: 1700), p. 4.

combustion', were seen as blasphemers of God's Word.³² Walter Gostelo wrote 'fire, ashes, and [the] Bible are made up of the Word and power of God', he who 'so contem[n]s his Word, his fire makes ashes of them'.³³ The uncharitable rich were also the targets of divine wrath. John Hart warned that just as 'the poor will curse him' so too 'god himself curseth them... by fire or Robbery'.³⁴ One sermon even used scripture to prohibit the 'immoderate use of tobacco', not because of the dangers it posed to domestic combustibles, but because it was the Devil, that archfiend of flame, who had been spotted lighting the pipe of a habitual smoker.³⁵

When it came to urban fires, the Bible was used just as much by the godly. Though it is hard to know whether the purchases of Bibles rose during these climactic events, the responses to them by saints were undeniably biblical.³⁶ Locally and nationally, urban conflagrations caused a slew of 'Jeremiad' sermons that made their way from pulpit to press.³⁷ Ballads and poems on town fires drew as much as these admonitory sermons on well-known biblical typologies and parables.³⁸ Bespoke prayers, with carefully chosen biblical verses, were also printed to be said annually in churches during fast days for particularly devastating fires (as was the case with the Fire of London).³⁹ At home, affected families earnestly searched the scriptures for signs of

³² Cf., John Hilliard, *Fire from Heauen. Burning the body of one John Hittchell of Holne-hurst, within the parish of Christ-church, in the county of South-hampton the 26. of June last 1613. who by the same was consumed to ashes, and no fire seene* (London: 1613); Anon, *Strange and terrible news from Ireland, or a full and true relation of a maid at Dublin... found with her flesh burnt off her arms, and lying by her black like burnt leather, yet no visible fire near her. And still she continues burning, by a supernatural fire or inflammation in the flesh* (London: 1673?); Anon, *Digitus dei. A faithful relation and collection of seven wonderful and remarkable judgements* (London: 1677), p. 4.

³³ Walter Gostelo, *The coming of God in mercy, in vengeance* (London: 1658), D1v.

³⁴ John Hart, *The Charitable Christian* (London: 1662), A5v-A6r.

³⁵ Cf., Jolly, *Note-Book*, ed. by Henry Fishwick, p. 86. Yet parishioners lashed back on sermons against smoking. On Twelfth Night in 1628 a libel was afoot in Colchester which depicted several of the town's ministers 'taking tobacco with the devil' (Fox, 'Religious Satire', in *The Reformation in English Towns*, ed. by Collinson and Craig, p. 225).

³⁶ For the sale of Bibles see Green, *Print and Protestantism*, p. 586.

³⁷ Cf., William Whately, *Sinne no more, or a sermon preached in the parish church of Banbury on Tuesday the fourth of March last past* (London: 1628); Nathaniel Hardy, *Lamentation, mourning, and woe sighed forth in a sermon preached in the parish-church of St. Martin in the Fields, on the 9th day of September: being the next Lords-day after the dismal fire in the city of London* (London: 1666); William Gearing, *Londons remembrancer, or, A sermon preached at the Church of St. Mary Le Bow on September the 3d, 1688* (London: 1688).

³⁸ Cf., R. P., *London's lamentations: or, some affectionate breathings forth on London's late ruines by fire* (London: 1666); Anon, *Northampton in flames, or, Poem on the dreadful fire that happened there on Monday the 20th Septemb. 1675* (London: 1675); Anon, *The dreadful voice of fire, begun at Edinburgh, the 3d of February 1700* (London: 1700), broadside.

³⁹ Church of England, *A form of common prayer to be used on Wednesday the tenth day of October next, throughout the whole kingdom of England and dominion of Wales* (London: 1666); Church of England, *A form of prayer to be used yearly on the second of September, for the dreadful fire of London* (London: 1696). Although some struggled to adhere to these. Philip Henry noted in his diary on 2 September 1671

individual or national culpability.⁴⁰ The Bibles that survived these conflagrations were passed down the generations as providential objects.⁴¹ Instead of the apotropaic (and Catholic) use of ‘scorch marks’ and incantatory spells, Protestant households used scriptural prayers to guard their homes from fire and lightning.⁴² The firebacks of and chimneybreasts above fireplaces, where urban fires often started, depicted suitable Bible stories.⁴³ These were both mnemonic and totemic devices. Their imagery would remind those within the home of the dangers of fire, whilst also serving to increase their faith that God would spare them from any such conflagration. This Biblicism spilled over into the accounts written about urban fires.

The Finger of God

Fires in populated areas, though often accidental, were rarely ever seen as coincidental. These tragedies were not caused by blind ‘undesigning Chance’ but instead framed as specifically ‘designed Punishment[s]’.⁴⁴ Though ‘some places by the divine Providence’ were ‘more appropriate for Miracles than others’, one pamphleteer

that he ‘attempted to keep y^e Annual fast this day in remembr. of y^e dreadful fire of london. A[nn]o. 66. but strength fail’d. to will was present, to doe was not’ (Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 242). Set prayers for national disasters was a practise that went back to the Reformation. In April, 1580, Sir Walter Mildmay, with Lord Burghley, Robert, Earl of Leicester, Sir Francis Walsingham and other Lords of the Council, wrote to archbishop Grindal on the occasion of an earthquake in Yorkshire, commending his form of prayer to be used in all the parish churches for the ‘turning of God’s wrath from us’ (Sir Walter Mildmay, ‘Sir Walter Mildmay of Apethorpe’, in *Brief Memoir of the Mildmay Family*, ed. by St. John Mildmay (London: 1913), pp. 36-59 (p. 50)).

⁴⁰ Cf., Wallington, *Historical Notices*, I, pp. 238-239; Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 193; Thomas Jolly, *The Note-Book of the Rev. Thomas Jolly, A.D. 1671–1693*, ed. by Henry Fishwick (Chetham Society, 1894), pp. 57-58.

⁴¹ Sally Brooks, ‘The Mystery of the Burnt Bible’, *Museum of London*, <<https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/mysterious-burned-bible>> [accessed 12 November 2017].

⁴² For the Catholic prevention of household fires see Timothy Easton, ‘Candlepowers’, *Cornerstone*, 32.4 (2011), pp. 56-60; John Aubrey, *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme*, ed. by James Britten (London: 1881), p. 136. For the use of protection prayer by Protestants see Matthew Henry, *A Model of Prayer* (London: 1710), p. 211.

⁴³ Cf., Tara Hamling, ‘Seeing Salvation in the Domestic Hearth in Post-Reformation’, in *Sin and Salvation*, ed. by Willis, pp. 223-244 (pp. 234-243). Images included the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from King Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace (Daniel 3.1-30); as well as when St Paul was bitten, but not harmed, by a snake that leapt out of a fire (Acts 28.3).

⁴⁴ Scott reiterated ‘on the one hand it argues an uncharitable and superstitious mind to attribute every calamity of our Brother to the Righteous Judgement and Displeasure of God; yet on the other hand, it’s no less an argument of a stupid wretchless Soul, to attribute those Evils to chance, on which there are such apparent symptoms of the Divine Displeasure’ (John Scott, *A sermon preached before the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor, aldermen, and citizens of London at the church of St. Mary le Bow, September the second, 1686: being the anniversary fast for the dreadful fire in the year 1666* (London: 1686), p. 7).

asserted, the ‘hand of GOD is [not] confined to any place’.⁴⁵ Urban fires were not random occurrences, then, but carried particular messages. They were ‘Lessons written in bright Characters of Fire’, impressed with such ‘visible Characters of the Divine Displeasure’.⁴⁶

St Nicholas was well aware of this. He wished that in the aftermath of London’s fire in 1666,

O then that we could learn at length to spell,
And put together, and read plain and well
The voice that doth from this fiery mountain come;⁴⁷

Yet before fire narratives could decrypt the message of such atrocities, they had to cite its messenger: that God was the author and authoriser of them.

Writers did so by paraphrasing a passage taken from the Book of Exodus. When Aaron, at the behest of Moses, stretched out his hand and ‘smote the dust of the earth’ causing a plague of lice ‘in man, and in beast’, Pharaoh’s sorcerers attempted but failed to replicate this miracle.⁴⁸ It was at this point that the sorcerers acknowledged this marvel, not as an act of Israelite magic, but as a supernatural act of their God,

(Exodus 8.19) Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger
of God: and Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto
them;

This passage was used to reinforce the undeniable ‘providentialism’ of urban fires. That they were no mere natural or man-made disasters, but deliberate signs from a just

⁴⁵ Anon, *The Most true and wonderfull relation of a starre of a great magnitude, and casting forth a flame as big as any bushell, that was seene at Haulin a town not farre from the city of Glocester* (London: 1658), p. 1.

⁴⁶ William Sherlock, *A sermon preach’d on the second of September being the fast for the fire of London, at the cathedral church of St. Paul’s* (London: 1699), p. 24; Scott, *A sermon preached... being the Anniversary fast for the dreadful fire in the year 1666*, p. 7.

⁴⁷ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 69-71, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 131. St Nicholas expressed a similar wish to understand God’s Providence when he had narrowly escaped drowning when a coach he was travelling in turned over during an ‘extraordinary sudden flood’ in 1663. He writes, ‘O that I could understand/The language of such voices, and/Be taking out such lessons thence/As might improve obedience’ (St Nicholas, ‘A Return To The Echo’ (1663), lines 27-30, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 76).

⁴⁸ Exodus 8.17.

cosmic deity. This scripture also carried an implicit warning to any potential naysayers who, like the hard-hearted Pharaoh, refused to acknowledge the power of God as the cause of such calamities.

This biblical passage proved particularly pertinent to accounts of the Great Fire of London. As stated above, writers often blamed urban fires on the ‘wicked designs’ of papists during the seventeenth century.⁴⁹ While London was still smouldering in September 1666, Catholics were accused once more. Fears were seemingly confirmed when Robert Hubert, a Catholic watchmaker, confessed – it is now believed falsely – to starting the blaze, and was summarily tried and hanged.⁵⁰ Despite the scapegoating, English Protestants of every hue used Exodus 8.19 to show that though Catholics may have orchestrated the fire, it was God alone who had ordered it. The godly were to respond with repentance rather than revenge.

After suspecting the ‘firers’ of London to be the ‘generation/Of old Guy Fawkes’, St Nicholas nonetheless cautioned,

Yet still we must conclude, whatever evil
Is in this city, whether man or devil
Be instrumental, *God’s hand* still extends
In ordering all to high and holy ends;
And ’twill become us t’eye the hand of God
More than the stone, and humbly kiss the rod.⁵¹

He was not the only poet to emphasize God’s role in permitting the city’s inferno as a cause for national repentance. A broadside entitled *London Undone* (1666), rang:

⁴⁹ Anon, *Bloody newes from Norwich or, a true relation of a bloody attempt of the papists in Norwich, to consume the whole city by fire* (London: 1641), A2r; William Bedloe, *A narrative and impartial discovery of the horrid Popish plot: carried on for the burning and destroying the cities of London and Westminster* (London: 1679), p. 2; Anon, *The Jesuites firing-plot revived* (London: 1680), p. 11; Anon, *A Full and true account of the sad and dreadful fire which happened in the borough of Southwark on the 22 of September, 1689... and the manner of seizing a notorious papist* (London: 1689), p. 3.

⁵⁰ Cf., Committee to Enquire into the Burning of London, *London’s flames being an exact and impartial account of divers informations given in to the committee of Parliament* (London: 1679), pp. 2-4; Stephen Porter, ‘Farriner, Thomas (1615/16?–1670)’, *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, September 2004.

⁵¹ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 62, 53-54, 63-68, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 131, italics my emphasis.

Let others look at second Causes, I
 See nothing in it but a De[it]y
 If I look up to Heavens A[lmig]ty Lord
 Shall I with A[e]sop's Dog snarl at the Stone?
 No, I'll observe the Hand whence it was throwne.
 My Sins have forc'd this Vengeance from my God,
 Shall I then kick? No, I will kiss the Rod;⁵²

A printed poem entitled *London's Lamentations* (1666) instructed that the lessons to be learned by this 'severe Rod of the Fire' were,

Let's in these desolations Gods hand see
 And under it abas'd and humble be.
 Before this God tremble and feare each one,
 Who makes such dismal desolation!
 And in thy works how terrible art thou,
 S[a]y unto God, as we have seen thee now!⁵³

John Tabor in his poem 'On the Burning of LONDON' (1667), was more terse in expressing,

Gods Hand
 Is stretched out against this sinful Land.⁵⁴

Dissenters were no different in employing the tell-tale epithet of Exodus 8.19, the 'finger of God', in their prose chronicles of the London fire. One example is Thomas Vincent, the ejected clergyman of St Mary Magdalen, Milk Street, London. He was one of the few men who had returned to minister to those suffering from the plague the year previously. Vincent wrote in his treatise on the Great Fire that despite the 'Popish design' the 'extraordinary hand of God, then of any men, did appear in the

⁵² Anon, *London undone; or, A reflection upon the late disasterous fire* (London: 1666), broadside.

⁵³ R. P., *London's lamentations*, p. 4.

⁵⁴ Tabor, *Seasonable thoughts in sad times*, p. 19.

burning of the City of *London*'.⁵⁵ Vincent called for a speedy repentance and reformation of the city. Similarly, there were men like Matthew Mead who, like Vincent, was also an ejected minister, and said to be one of 'Chief Ringleaders' among the separatist congregations in London.⁵⁶ In *A Consideration of the Late Dreadful Judgement by Fire* (1667) Mead argued that 'the original of these flames', were 'kindled by no humane means', but rather that 'the finger of God shall be acknowledged therein'.⁵⁷

God's primacy in starting the fire, established by Exodus 8.19, was also expressed to officials of – and in official records kept by – the government. The heraldic writer Edward Waterhouse in his *A short narrative of the late dreadful fire in London* (1667), a work dedicated to his kinsman and friend Sir Edward Turnor (the then Speaker of the House of Commons), stated that the devastation of London by fire was 'by a special and not to be disputed finger of God'.⁵⁸ He hoped that the city would learn the 'wisdom of humbling her self under this mighty hand of God'.⁵⁹ When the almanac writer William Lilly was questioned by the Commons as to cause of the fire, Lilly apparently having predicted it in his *Merlini Anglici Ephemeris* (1666), he simply answered, 'I conclude, That it was the onely finger of God', adding 'but what instruments hee used there unto, I am ignorant'.⁶⁰ The Privy Council concurred that the fire was caused 'by the hand of God, a great wind, and a very dry season'.⁶¹

These remarks were not just general invocations of scripture, but serious attempts to avoid inciting the kind of xenophobic hysteria which may have led to the lynching of native and foreign Catholics. Exodus 8.19 helped shift the emphasis away from those who had started the fire, to why God had allowed it to occur.⁶² Sadly, such

⁵⁵ Thomas Vincent, *Gods terrible voice in the city of London* (Cambridge: 1667), p. 22. Thomas Doolittle wrote of the Great Fire of London that 'whatever was the means, God was the Author; who ever were the second causes, God was the first' (Thomas Doolittle, *Rebukes for sin by God's burning anger, by the burning of London* (London: 1667), p. 110).

⁵⁶ Richard L. Greaves, 'Meade [Mead], Matthew (1628/9–1699)', *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, September 2004.

⁵⁷ Matthew Mead, *An appendix to Solomon's prescription for the removal of the pestilence enforcing the same from a consideration of the late dreadful judgement by fire* (London: 1667), p. 3.

⁵⁸ Edward Waterhouse, *A short narrative of the late dreadful fire in London* (London: 1667), p. 6.

⁵⁹ Waterhouse, *A short narrative of the late dreadful fire in London*, p. 175.

⁶⁰ Qtd. in Elias Ashmole, *Ashmole's Autobiographical and Historical Notes His Correspondence and Other Contemporary Sources Relating to His Life and Work*, ed. by C. H. Josten, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967), III, p. 1075.

⁶¹ *CSPD*, 1666-7, p. 175.

⁶² The broadside ballad *London mourning in A[s]hes* (1666) ran 'Many of French and Dutch were stop'd/and also are confin'd,/Tis said that they their Fire-balls drop'd/and this Plot was design'd,/By Them and Those/That are our Foes,/yet some think nothing so;/But that our God,/With his flaming Rod,/for Sin sends all this woe'. The contention between whether God or Catholics were responsible for

attempts were only partially successful. Rumours of a global Catholic conspiracy to fire the city by a 'Cabal of Several Notorious Priests and Jesuits' were fanned into flame by anti-Catholic writers such as Roger L'Estrange and Andrew Marvell.⁶³ Others saw the blaze as an act of foreign sabotage that was to serve as the precursor to a Dutch and French naval invasion.⁶⁴

Accounts of other urban fires also employed the scripturalism of Exodus 8.19. John Hilliard's lengthy treatise *Fire from Heaven* (1613) described the sudden burning of houses in Christ-Church, Southampton in the summer of that year as something that 'ought not to be attributed to any naturall cause, but it is euen the Finger of God', which required 'earnest and hearty repentance'.⁶⁵ A pamphlet that recounted a blaze that levelled a house in Goodmans-Fields, London in 1684, saw this tragedy as 'the immediate hand of God'.⁶⁶ *A Faithful Account of the Late Dreadful Fire in Southwark* (1676), a conflagration which destroyed nearly five hundred houses in twenty hours, explained that 'howsoever it came about, I am sure it was an Omnipotent hand that suffered it'.⁶⁷ *A True and Faithful Relation of the Late Dreadful Fire at Northampton* (1675) observed that 'though people are apt upon such sad occasions to attribute the original to malice, revenge or some secondary cause', yet 'questionless was God Almighty the superintendent'.⁶⁸

the fire is represented on the inscriptions carved at the base of Christopher Wren's Monument, erected in St. Margaret's, Fish Street in 1677. The north face of the Monument contains a plaque with a description of the fire in Latin. When translated a section reads that the blaze was quenched only 'at the bidding, as we may well believe, of heaven'. The phrase which once came after this line, read, 'But Popish frenzy, which wrought such horrors, is not yet quenched'. It was added in 1681, and later removed in 1830. These inscriptions can be found at: London Remembers, 'Great Fire Monument', *London Remembers* <<http://www.londonremembers.com/memorials/the-monument-stand-north>> [accessed 1 October 2017].

⁶³ Cf., Roger L'Estrange, *A compendious history of the most remarkable passages of the last fourteen years with an account of the plot, as it was carried on both before and after the fire of London, to this present time* (London: 1680), A4v; Andrew Marvell, *A seasonable argument to perswade all the grand juries in England to petition for a new Parliament* (London: 1677). Also cf., Sir William Coventry, *Englands appeal from the private cabal at White-Hall to the great council of the nation* (London: 1673). This may be why Dryden, in the aftermath of the Popish Plot, in a wry inversion of the 'Korah' motif as representative of Catholic sedition, caricatured Titus Oates as a minatory example of those who 'In Corah's own predicament will fall' (John Dryden, 'Absalom and Achitophel. A Poem (1681)', in *The Works of John Dryden, Vol. 2: Poems 1681-1684*, ed. by H. T. Swedenberg, Jr and Vinton A. Dearing, 20 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), II, pp. 2-36 (p. 25) (line 680)).

⁶⁴ Cf., Porter, *The Great Fire*, p. 45, pp. 61-62.

⁶⁵ Hilliard, *Fire from Heaven*, B1r.

⁶⁶ Anon, *A true account of the fire which happen'd in Goodmans Fields* (London: 1684), p. 2.

⁶⁷ Anon, *A faithful account of the late dreadful fire in Southwark Begun on Friday the 26th. of May, 1676* (London: 1676), p. 5.

⁶⁸ Anon, *A true and faithful relation of the late dreadful fire at Northampton* (London: 1675), p. 3.

By using Exodus 8.19, writers re-cast urban fires as not arbitrary or even inevitable events. They were the handiwork of God. Though culprits were sought out, as we shall see later, on the whole such Biblicism helped encourage reflective rather than retributive action. For once God's involvement had been made clear, in allowing such fires to happen, people could then discern his purposes. This was because urban fires, like other *force majeure*, were 'legible Characters' of the Lord's wrath to them. To those who survived these tumults, such 'Providence[s] do bare large characters of the Deity'.⁶⁹ When it came to town or city fires, English men and women were to 'learne to spell out his meaning' touching themselves not others, striving to decipher these 'so lively documents' of divine admonition.⁷⁰ Fire narratives like St Nicholas' served as intermediaries, which attempted to 'spell' and 'read plain and well' the cosmic meanings of such tragedies.⁷¹

As a phrase, the 'finger [or hand] of God' enabled urban fire narratives to link themselves to other providential accounts of floods, plagues and earthquakes.⁷² These had also employed the Exodus epithet to reveal that natural disasters had supernatural origins. Yet urban fire writers also sought to use scripture to differentiate such conflagrations from these other calamities. In doing so, they could decipher a particular, rather than just a universal, moral from them.

The Judgement Upon the Tribes of Korah, Dathan and Abiram

If God 'makes some Flame of Fire his messenger', what was His message?⁷³ Writers turned to two Old Testament episodes to interpret urban conflagrations. The first of these was the rain of fire and earthquake that served as God's judgement against three rebellious tribes. When the people of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (hereafter 'Korah') rebelled against Moses and Aaron in the desert, questioning their priestly status, the Lord sent two distinct punishments. To the women and children of the rebellious faction He delivered a harrowing blow,

⁶⁹ Thomas Vincent, *Fire and brimstone from heaven* (London: 1670), p. 51.

⁷⁰ Qtd. in Walsham, *Providence*, p. 124.

⁷¹ St Nicholas, 'The Voice of the Rod, 1666', lines 69-70, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 131.

⁷² Cf., Anon, *Sad and lamentable newes from Holland... drowned* (London: 1663), p. 4; John Featley, *A divine antidote against the plague; or Mourning teares, in soliloquies and prayers* (London: 1665), p. 69; Thomas Doolittle, *Earthquakes explained and practically improved occasioned by the late earthquake on Sept. 8, 1692 in London* (London: 1692), A3v.

⁷³ William Turner, *A compleat history of the most remarkable providences both of judgment and mercy, which have hapned in this present age* (London: 1697), p. 44, also cf., B2r.

(Numbers 16.27, 32-33) So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side... and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children. And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses... and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation.

For the male ringleaders, the Almighty reserved a separate and special retribution,

(Numbers 16.35) And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men.

This biblical precedent ensured that early modern writers often assumed that earthquakes would be followed by fires, and fires by earthquakes, as part of God's judgements against sin. The two almost became inseparable, with woodcut illustrations often representing the one with the other (Figure 9).⁷⁴ Urban fire narratives were able to use this biblical holocaust to assign specific blame to various religious and political groups. This was perfectly legitimate. Writers could see both 'the finger of God' in town fires and search out the earthly agents who were responsible for them.

This was never more true than in the frenzied paranoia that gripped people in the aftermath of the Great Fire of London. St Nicholas equated the city's conflagration to,

the judgment that on Korah fell,
And on his complices i'the way to hell,
Were a just guerdon; nay, th'infernal pit
For such strange firers, if the Lord saw fit.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Cf., Anon, *A true relation... [a] house was consumed with fire from heauen, and her selfe swallowed into the earth. All which hapned the 16. of December last. 1608* (London: 1609).

⁷⁵ St Nicholas, 'The Voice of the Rod, 1666', lines 59-62, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 131. His use of this biblical judgement may also have been an Independent critique of Presbyterian church government. Cf., John Milton, 'The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates (1649)', in *The Complete Works of John Milton, Vol. 6: Vernacular Regicide and Republican Writings*, ed. by Neil Keeble and Nicholas McDowell, 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), VI, pp. 131-186 (p. 154).

These ‘strange firers’ were Catholics, ‘the generation/Of Old Guy Fawkes’ who
 ‘ventured now/To act above ground what he did below’.⁷⁶ God used them as an
 admonition to the country’s political and clerical elite. For as St Nicholas explained,

judgments, many times,
 That are more national, point most at crimes
 That are so too, which public persons best,
 Yea, only they may mend among the rest.⁷⁷

I will return to who exactly these ‘public persons’ are later. St Nicholas had shown, by
 citing Korah, how God had used sinful recusants to punish sinful Protestants.

Other poets of the Great Fire made this biblical connection. John Tabor wrote of
 how the judgement against the city resembled the treatment of,

the rebellious mutineers of old
 When the Earth strangely swallowed up those bold
 Conspirators of *Corah*’s faction⁷⁸

Tabor, however, blamed religious dissenters like St Nicholas – rather than those in
 Church or civil government – for the blaze:

Have we not murmurers among us too,
 Like to rebellious *Corah*, and his crew?
 Will, what is *Moses*, and what *Aaron*, say,
 Are we not all holy, as well as they?
 To rule, and sacrifice, all would have pow’r:
 Might not for this a fire from God devour
 The City, which as eminent in sin,
 Hath exemplary now in judgment been?⁷⁹

⁷⁶ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 53-54, 55-56, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 131.

⁷⁷ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 87-90, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 132.

⁷⁸ Tabor, *Seasonable thoughts in sad times*, p. 40.

⁷⁹ Tabor, *Seasonable thoughts in sad times*, p. 41.

The printed *Poem Written on... the Libellious and Seditious Censurers of the Late Fire in the City of London* (1666) was far more specific, and accused parliamentarians of being just as guilty as (if not more so than) Catholics for God's fiery correction upon the city. In a direct comparison with the punishment to those traitors in Numbers 16, the writer asked Roundheads if they would stop blaming the sin of recusancy and ponder their own sin of having attempted to extirpate episcopacy:

Consider how your own [sins] may God displease.
 Was *Corah, Dathan, and Abirams* Crew, then?
 Not such a kinde of *Cattle* (pray) as you?
 Was not their crime Rebellion? 'gainst whom
 Was *Moses* not, and *Aaron* (pray) the men?
 Don't ye the *same in disobedience* do
 Against your *Lord the King* and *Bishops* too?
 Are not your *murmurings* pray even such,
 The *Bishops take upon them too too much?*
 And (like that cursed Crew too) don't ye cry
 The Clergy they *are lifted up too high?*
 And did not on those Rebels this provoke
 From angry Heaven a most hideous stroke?⁸⁰

These sentiments were widely shared. The fire taking place so close to the 3 September, (the date of Cromwell's victories at Dunbar and Worcester more than a decade and a half ago), was seen as no coincidence. It was believed by many that the fire was a deliberate attempt by the nation's old 'implacable enemies' (such as Presbyterians, Anabaptists, Quakers and other 'disaffected persons'), to reverse the Restoration and return power to religious 'fanatics'.⁸¹ These partisan views were also rooted in Royalist rhetoric. Equating parliamentarians to the rebels of 'Korah' was drilled into Royalists during the monthly Friday fast-days instituted by King Charles I in 1643. The subject of the fast's morning lesson was to be either on the rebellion of

⁸⁰ T. S., *A yoke for the Roman-bulls Being a poem written on the royal proclamation for exiling popish-priests and Jesuits, &c. To which is added, A telescope for the new astrologers: or, A looking-glass for the staring star-gazers. Wherein is a reply to the libellious and seditious censurers of the late fire in the City of London* (London: 1666), p. 7.

⁸¹ T. S., *A poem written on... the late fire in the City*, p. 8.

‘Korah’ against Moses or that mounted by Absalom against King David.⁸² The author of *The Late Fire in the City of London* had re-appropriated Charles’ biblical indictment of parliamentarianism to suit their own providential argument about why the Great Fire had happened.

Poets like John Allison, a Fellow of King’s College, Cambridge, were more cautious and less specific. In his printed poem *Upon the Late Lamentable Accident of the Fire in the Famous City of London* (1667), Allison saw the blaze as comparable to the same national sins that had incurred major Old Testament calamities,

When they were ripe for punishment, and all
 Their vice did for a signal judgment call,
 The thirsty earth did gape again
 Impatient of an other flood of rain,
 And opening swallow’d some alive, because’t had lookt in vain.⁸³

Allison concluded ambiguously that God’s

Fire comes from Heav’n, or Fire from Earth
 Thus the four Elements take turns,
 He Drowns, he Swallows us alive, he Plagues, or else he Burns.⁸⁴

One sees how the genocidal judgement enacted by God in Numbers 16, was variously interpreted and manipulated by poets and balladeers.

The allusion to the ‘cursed Crew’ of Korah also occurred in more prosaic chronicles of the city’s fire. In his treatise entitled *Gods Terrible Voice in the City of London* (1667) Thomas Vincent likened the scene when Londoners began to move their belongings to higher and safer ground to the Moorfields during the fire, to when ‘the people did’ run towards the raised ‘Tabernacles of *Corah, Dathan, and Abiram*, when

⁸² Christopher Durston, “‘For the Better Humiliation of the People’: Public Days of Fasting and Thanksgiving During the English Revolution”, *The Seventeenth Century*, 7.1 (1992), pp. 129-149 (p. 136).

⁸³ John Allison, *Upon the late Lamentable Accident of the Fire in the Famous City of London* (London: 1667), p. 2.

⁸⁴ Allison, *Upon the late Lamentable Accident of the Fire*, p. 3.



Figure 9. ‘Core, Dathan and Abiron’, in Hans Holbein, *Icones Historiarum Veteris Testamenti* (Lyons: 1547), E1r. Contrary to the biblical passage that inspired this illustration, Holbein conflates God’s punishment of fire and earthquake as happening in the same place to the same people. Several pamphlets did the same in linking natural disasters (textually and visually) to the two judgements inflicted upon the seditious tribes of ‘Core, Dathan and Abiron’.⁸⁵

the earth did cleave asunder and swallow them up, *Numb.* 16.27, 31, 32’.⁸⁶ Vincent, like many other commentators, was making a point about the fire as an explicit punishment for the city’s excessive greed.⁸⁷ A fellow dissenter, Samuel Rolle, the ejected minister of Thistleworth (Isleworth), Middlesex in his treatise *Shlohavot, or, The Burning of London* (1667), expressed a different view. He saw a parallel between

⁸⁵ Cf., John Chapman, *A most true report of the myraculous mouing and sinking of a plot of ground* (London: 1596), A3v; Anon, *Strange and true newes from Glocester* (London: 1660), p. 4; Anon, *God’s strange and terrible judgment in Oxford-shire being a true relation how a woman at Atherbury* (London: 1677), p. 3.

⁸⁶ Cf., Waterhouse, *A short narrative of the late dreadful fire in London*, p. 113; William Gearing, *God’s sovereignty displayed from Job 9. 12* (London: 1667), p. 150; Samuel Rolle, *Shlohavot, or, The burning of London in the year 1666* (London: 1667), p. 72.

⁸⁷ Vincent, *Gods terrible voice in the city of London*, p. 24. For his life, see Beth Lynch, ‘Vincent, Thomas (1634–1678)’, *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, September 2004.

the ‘Rebellion against Moses and Aaron, procuring a destructive Fire, *Numb.* 16’ (where the two men were seen as types of ‘Magistracy and Ministry’) and the civil and religious dissent in England that had brought on London’s calamitous blaze,

O Lord, that so many fires have been formerly kindled in the world, by mens following the way of *Korah*, and let the example of thy severity upon him and his complices, and on others that have trod in their steps, for ever deter men from kindling new fires upon the like accounts or (which is worse) provoking thee to kindle a fire upon them, as thou lately didst upon that once famous City of *London*, which now lieth in ashes.⁸⁸

Rolle, unlike Vincent, was a defender of ‘moderate nonconformity’ and these comments were no doubt directed at the more radical wing of the dissenter community within London.⁸⁹

Whoever was to blame, the allusion to the conflagration at Korah as a parallel to the Great Fire of 1666 was long remembered and rehearsed from pulpits and presses by English conformists. John Scott, preaching an anniversary sermon on the fire two decades later, stated that the ‘Evils and Calamities’ of that tragedy were akin to ‘the Judgement of *Corah*, *Dathan*, and *Abiram*’.⁹⁰ Equally, John Moore, curate of Brislington, Gloucestershire in his polemic *The Banner of Corah, Dathan, and Abiram* (1696) explained that the Great Fire of London was only possible because, just like the mutinous Korah, ‘the Sin of such Nonconformity, doth exceedingly provoke the Lord to Anger, and stir up the Fire of his Jealousie’.⁹¹

Clearly scripturalist writers did not agree with St Nicholas on which religious or political group stood as the typological equivalent to the treasonous ‘Korah’, and thus who were responsible for the judgement on London. Nonetheless, the allusion to ‘Korah’ served as a useful biblical short hand to disguise the partisan prejudices of England’s preachers and poets.⁹²

⁸⁸ Rolle, *Shlohavot, or, The burning of London*, p. 41, p. 42.

⁸⁹ Cf., Ian L. O’Neill, ‘Rolls [Rolle], Samuel (c.1628–1679/80)’, *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, September 2004.

⁹⁰ Scott, *A sermon preached... being the Anniversary fast for the dreadful fire in the year 1666*, p. 6.

⁹¹ John Moore, *The banner of Corah, Dathan, and Abiram, display’d, and their sin discover’d in several sermons, preach’d at Bristol* (London: 1696), p. 18.

⁹² Such allusions inform the way we read the use of this scripture within other contemporary texts. John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) may have been hinting at the cause of the Great Fire of London when he had Hope tell Christian that Demas’ pursuit of treasure in the Hill Lucre was like to go the way

Other urban fire narratives written during England's long Reformation evoked similar Biblicism. John Hilliard, the cleric of the small village of Sopley, Hampshire, claimed that the Southampton fire in 1613 showed 'how wickedly some have growne to rebellion' against the 'good lawes' of James I, some even having 'conspired the death both of his Maiestie and his posteritie', for whose punishment 'the earth hath swallowed, as Corath, Dathan, and Abiram'.⁹³ Hilliard was of course referring to English Papists. Their Gunpowder Plot, that 'Quintessence of all impiety', and their continued militant recusancy had caused much consternation for the irenic Scottish monarch.⁹⁴ Anthony Burgess, the Sutton Coldfield Presbyterian preacher, compared the dreadful fire that broke out in Allhallows, London in 1649 to that '*exemplary justice* on seditious *Korah* and his complices' in his sermon given on the anniversary of that tragedy six years later.⁹⁵ Burgess was referring to the sectaries of the city that had several meeting houses scattered across London at the time.⁹⁶ A broadside entitled *The Dreadful Voice of Fire, Begun at Edinburgh* (1700) also equated its conflagration to the sulphurous earthquake inflicted upon the people of Korah:

Earth opened it's mouth, 'gainst people bad,
(Because to Heav'n, no mouths these people had)
And, weary of it's Bu[rden] did enclose
Them in it's hollow womb; There to disclose
The real darkness, which their Sins did love,
And En'mity against the Powers above;
For which just Heav'n sent them a packing thence.
Like *Korah*, *Dathan*, for their sad Offence.⁹⁷

of '*Korah*, *Dathan*, and *Abiram*, with the two hundred and fifty men, that perished in their sin' (John Bunyan, 'The Pilgrim's Progress (1600–1672): The First Part', in *The Pilgrim's Progress: from this World to That which is to Come* (Second Edition), ed. by James Blanton Wharey and Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967), p. 109). Bunyan's depiction would certainly have concurred with those who saw the London blaze as a judgement against the city's greed.

⁹³ Hilliard, *Fire from Heaven*, A4v-B1r.

⁹⁴ Walsham, *Providence*, p. 245.

⁹⁵ Anthony Burgess, *Safety in the midst of danger a sermon preached in the church of Alhallowes Barkin, Jan. 4, 1655: upon the anniversary commemoration of the dismall fire which happened in the said parish, on Jan. 4, 1649* (London: 1656), A2r.

⁹⁶ Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships*, p. 310, p. 268.

⁹⁷ Anon, *The dreadful voice of fire, begun at Edinburgh*, broadside.

As we will see later, this ‘sad Offence’ was to do with the city’s sin of ‘Luxury’ – a criticism probably aimed at the prosperous tradesmen who operated within Edinburgh.

Such scriptural allusions went as far back as the Reformation. When St Paul’s caught fire after a lightning strike in 1561, James Pilkington, the bishop of Durham, justified the destruction in that ‘God strikes sodainly and sore, as appeares in the Scripture’ by ‘Chore [Korah] Dathan and Abiron’ whereby ‘part of them were sodenlye swallowed up of the earth, and part brent sodainlye with fire from heauen’.⁹⁸ This was a punishment, Pilkington asserted, for the people not accepting the ‘Priestes appoynted by God’, but moving away from them, ‘seking a newe waye to serue God’.⁹⁹ Pilkington may have been referring to those ‘perfect protestants’ who had proven such a thorn in the side of Elizabethan authorities.¹⁰⁰

In attempting to make sense of the scale of the human cost and loss of these fires, writers sought out the Korah-like rebels who had caused them. Instead of questioning divine agency, Korah allowed ministers, balladeers, pamphleteers and poets like St Nicholas to assign blame to human culprits in the form of targeted religious or political groups (Catholics, parliamentarians, dissenters, worldly tradesmen, and the political and clerical elite). In doing so, these accounts sought to reveal how ‘remedillesse and sudden fires’ were ‘evident signes of his [God’s] anger’ towards ‘traytors and rebels’ of his Word and will.¹⁰¹

Like, But Not Quite, Sodom and Gomorrah

Writers also likened urban conflagrations to another more famous Old Testament biblical city consumed by flame – Sodom and Gomorrah. Such associations are hardly surprising. Scenes of its destruction were depicted on silk embroidery, elaborately woven and wonderfully vivid.¹⁰² Sodom’s destruction was frequently performed on stage with stunning pyrotechnics, so ‘life-like’ they tricked audiences into believing that

⁹⁸ James Pilkington, *The burnynge of Paules church in London in the yeare of oure Lord 1561. and the iiii. day of June by lyghtnyng, at three of the clocke, at after noone, which continued terrible and helplesse unto nyght* (London: 1563), A2r.

⁹⁹ Pilkington, *The burnynge of Paules church in London*, A2r.

¹⁰⁰ Collinson, ‘The Shearmen’s Tree’, in *The Reformation in English Towns*, ed. by Collinson and Craig, p. 215.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Beard, *The Theatre of Gods Judgements* (4th edn., London: 1642), pp. 409-410.

¹⁰² Mary M. Brooks, ‘Performing curiosity: re-viewing women’s domestic embroidery in seventeenth-century England’, *The Seventeenth Century*, 32.1 (January 2017), pp. 1-29 (p. 4).

the playhouse was on fire.¹⁰³ Almost lost on modern sensibilities today, the burning of Sodom was a true horror story to the citizens of early modern towns and cities. To them, the imminency of this judgement was an all too real prospect. Such warnings, as those conveyed in Ester Biddle's broadside, were typical: 'WO[E] to thee Town of *Cambridge*, thy wickedness surmounteth the wickedness of *Sodom*; therefore repent whilst thou hast time, lest I consume thee with fire, as I have done it'.¹⁰⁴

The Bible tells of how the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah had attempted to rape three visiting Angels, staying at the house of Lot, who had been sent by God but failed to find the ten righteous souls needed to spare the cities from destruction. When Lot attempted to prevent the attack on his angelic guests, the people turned on him and attempted to kill him. Lot and his family were then safely escorted out of Sodom to the refuge of a neighbouring city named Zoar. Shortly afterwards God sent a devastating retribution for the inhabitants' abominations,

(Genesis 19.24-25) Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

This episode, alongside its classical equivalent in the burning of Troy, seemed particularly redolent to chroniclers of the Great Fire of London.¹⁰⁵

St Nicholas, in imagining the reaction of the city's onlookers, described,

are we in a dream,
And think we see the dismal, fatal scheme
Of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the flashes
That laid those cities in rude heaps and ashes?¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ MacKay, *Persecution, Plague, and Fire*, pp. 139-164.

¹⁰⁴ Ester Biddle, *Wo[e] to thee town of Cambridge, thy wickedness surmounteth the wickedness of Sodom* (London: 1660-69?), broadside.

¹⁰⁵ For London's fire being compared to that of Troy see Hardy, *Lamentation, mourning, and woe*, p. 22; Gearing, *God's sovereignty displayed*, p. 192; Sincera, *Observations, both historical and moral, upon the burning of London, September 1666*, p. 12; Rolle, *Shlohavot, or, The burning of London*, pp. 176-179.

¹⁰⁶ St Nicholas, 'The Voice of the Rod, 1666', lines 5-8, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 130. Joseph Guillim also opens his Great Fire poem with the drowsy citizens of London slowly waking up to the blaze. He remarks, in his *Akamaton pyr, or, The dreadful burning of London described in a poem* (1667), how initially:

London's Lamentations (1666) expressed the same sentiment,

Methinks it was some semblance of that Fire,
Which *Sodome* God consum'd with in his ire¹⁰⁷

Such allusions were not far off the reactions of those who actually witnessed London's inferno. John Evelyn remarked in his diary that the 'burning, [had] a resemblance of Sodom'.¹⁰⁸ Jeremiah Wells wrote in his Latin poem 'In Londini Incendium' (1667) that 'decidit e caelis sodomitica flamma' or 'The flames of Sodom descended from the heavens'.¹⁰⁹ Pepys' description of the London blaze came close, without being explicit, to evoking the horror of this smouldering biblical city. Walking through London on the third night of the blaze he describes how he 'saw the saddest sight of desolation that I ever saw. Everywhere great fires. Oyle-cellars and brimstone and other things burning'.¹¹⁰ Scholars have failed to notice that his phrasing was a paraphrase, perhaps unconsciously, of Deuteronomy 29.23, 'that the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning... like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah'.¹¹¹

Clerical and not just lay observers of the London fire made similar comparisons. Robert Elborough, minister of St. Laurence Pountney (and school friend of Pepys) in his sermon on the blaze preached that year at St. James Dukes-Place, London, stated 'Little did *Sodom* think of a fiery rainy day, when they had such a Sunshiny morning. Ah how art thou poor *London* a sad instance and evidence of the truth of this Doctrine, when in

No sooner some out of their Beds were gone,
But in bright Sheets of Flames their Houses shone:
And newly but awake, as now they gaze
Upon whole Streets in such a dismal Blaze:
They seem as still asleep, and what they see,
As some dire dream without reality (p. 2).

In his poem, Allison also related how dazed Londoners waking to the fire were 'so amaz'd did hardly know/Whether he still did Dream or no' (Allison, *Upon the late lamentable Accident of the fire*, p. 5).

¹⁰⁷ R. P., *London's lamentations*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Evelyn, *Diary*, ed. by Dobson, II, p. 253.

¹⁰⁹ Jeremiah Wells, *Poems upon divers occasions* (London: 1667), p. 46.

¹¹⁰ Pepys, *Diary*, ed. by Latham and Matthews, VII, p. 276.

¹¹¹ Similarly, Matthew Mead, like Pepys, paraphrased Deuteronomy 29.23 in describing how London 'was made like S[odo]me and Gomorrah, Brimstone, Salt and Burning' (Matthew Mead, *An appendix to Solomon's prescription for the removal of the pestilence enforcing the same from a consideration of the late dreadful judgement by fire* (London: 1667), p. 6).

the midst of thy security thou art overtaken with unparallel'd misery'.¹¹² Others like Isaac Archer, the incumbent of Chippenham in Cambridgeshire, observed the national 'fast for the fire' on 10 October 1666 where he tellingly preached on Amos 4.11, 'I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah'.¹¹³

As with Korah, such comparisons were long-lived in the memory of some pulpiteers. Benjamin Calamy, curate of St Mary Aldermanbury – preaching the anniversary fast sermon on the Great Fire some eighteen years later – remarked that just as in London, 'did not that miserable Fate, which befel *Sodom and Gomorra[h]*, serve to awaken the neighbouring Cities & Countries, when they beheld the bright Flames to ascend towards Heaven'.¹¹⁴ Like Korah too, Sodom carried specific sins: 'Pride and fulness of Bread, and Idleness'. It was these transgressions that writers of the Great Fire accused London of possessing.¹¹⁵

Chroniclers, however, did not compare London's inferno to Sodom without qualification (as they had done with Korah). They insisted that there was one important difference. The fire had devastated, but not totally destroyed, the English capital. Samuel Rolle wrote in his treatise that, 'the Beesom of destruction, which swept *London*, did not sweep so clean but God hath left some small remnant of City, that it might not be like *Sodom*, and like *Gomorrah*'.¹¹⁶ As did Thomas Vincent who wrote three years later that because of the few casualties, (there were less than ten who had died), '*London*'s Fire was nothing in comparison with *Sodoms* Fire' which had 'burnt persons as well as houses, and not one person in the whole City escaped'.¹¹⁷ When he described the Great Fire, Waterhouse stated, 'that *London* was fired from Heaven, as was *Sodom and Gomorrah* of old, though say they, God restrained the Fire from such dismal effects as then were permitted it'.¹¹⁸ He elaborated that he did 'not believe that

¹¹² Robert Elborough, *London's calamity by fire bewailed and improved in a sermon preached at St. James Dukes-Place* (London: 1666), p. 6.

¹¹³ Archer, 'Diary', in *Two East Anglian Diaries*, ed. by Storey, p. 113.

¹¹⁴ Benjamin Calamy, *A sermon preached before the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor, aldermen, and citizens of London at the Church of St. Mary le Bow, September the second, 1684, being the anniversary fast for the dreadful fire in the year 1666 by Benjamin Calamy* (London: 1685), p. 15. St Mary Aldermanbury was the very living from which his father, Edmund Calamy, had been ejected after the Restoration.

¹¹⁵ Cf., Waterhouse, *A short narrative of the late dreadful fire in London*, pp. 5-6; Owen Stockton, *Counsel to the afflicted, or, Instruction and consolation for such as have suffered loss by fire* (London: 1667), pp. 140-141; Rolle, *Shlohavot, or, The burning of London*, pp. 25-28; Hardy, *Lamentation, mourning, and woe*, p. 29.

¹¹⁶ Rolle, *Shlohavot, or, The burning of London*, p. 173.

¹¹⁷ Vincent, *Fire and brimstone from heaven*, p. 30.

¹¹⁸ Waterhouse, *A short narrative of the late dreadful fire in London*, pp. 2-3.

this Fire was like that of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*', for it was not like the 'Fire of exinanition to the earth and soyl' as described in Deuteronomy 29.23, whereby Sodom was nothing but 'Brimstone and Salt and Burning'.¹¹⁹ In his diary, Philip Henry equated those suburbs and citizens that were spared the city's 'sweeping Judgement' to 'somewhat like that of Lot fetcht out of Sodom. Gen. 19. 15. 16'.¹²⁰

The high survival rate is why St Nicholas' answer to his initial question, (as to whether the sight of London's 'heaps and ashes' was like Sodom), is in the negative,

are we in a dream,
And think we see the dismal, fatal scheme
Of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the flashes
That laid those cities in rude heaps and ashes?
Ah no!¹²¹

John Tabor was more eloquent in expressing God's special care in sparing a part of London,

Had not his mercy now a remnant spar'd,
Like *Sodom*, and *Gomorrah* we had far'd:
The City for the most part ruin'd lies,
To Gods just vengeance a due Sacrifice;
But through his mercy, just like a fire-brand,
Out of the burning pluckt, the Suburbs stand:
Their Goods for the most part too, and lives he saves,
Who in their houses might have found their graves.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Waterhouse, *A short narrative of the late dreadful fire in London*, pp. 2-3.

¹²⁰ Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 193.

¹²¹ St Nicholas, 'The Voice of the Rod, 1666', lines 5-9, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 130. Yet, for some, the memory of the Great Fire haunted their dreams and thoughts. Pepys records in his diary how he 'still, both sleeping and waking, had a fear of fire in my heart', and later how he was 'much terrified in the nights now-a-days with dreams of fire, and falling down of houses' (Pepys, *Diary*, ed. by Latham and Matthews, VII. p. 280, p. 285). After witnessing a 'terrible fire' at the Temple Inn in 1677, Ralph Thoresby wrote in his diary how 'to me it was so dreadful, that I can scarce suppress the terrible idea of it', and that it 'struck such a terror into my mind' (Ralph Thoresby, *The Diary of Ralph Thoresby, 1677-1724*, ed. by Rev. Joseph Hunter (London: 1830), pp. 4-5).

¹²² Tabor, *Seasonable thoughts in sad times*, p. 28.

Tabor's words 'like a fire-brand,/Out of the burning pluckt' echoed the second half of Isaac Archer's periscope of his fast sermon for the city's fire, based on Amos 4.11, 'ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning'. These writers were keen to stress that though London had been fired like Sodom, God had spared His firebrands.

Other urban fires were also likened to the 'fatal scheme/of Sodom'. Some were even seen as surpassing it. The 'Citties of *Sodome* and *Gomorrhah* were not more suddainely, or more horribly consumed with fire from heaven' one pamphlet resounded, 'then this Cittie of *Corke*' when a lightning storm ignited the city in 1622. It added an important proviso, 'Albeit I compare this Cittie with *Sodome* and *Gomorrhah*, it is not in respect of the sinnes, but in respect of the heavy hand of God shewed in like degree'.¹²³ Yet such hyperbole was rare. When a fire burned through the market-town of Wem, Shropshire in 1677, Andrew Parsons explained that it 'like that of *Sodom* came down from the Lord out of Heaven, it was so fierce and unquenchable'. However, it was granted a sign of divine mercy in that, 'No, saith God, I will not destroy it utterly yet, as I did *Sodom*: [for] there are righteous in it'.¹²⁴ Whereas a would-be catastrophic fire, such as the '*The Gunpowder Plot*', was depicted as an averted '*Sodom and Gomorrhah*' by some pamphleteers and players.¹²⁵

These depictions reveal the limitation of scripturalism; that interpretations and explications from God's Word could only be stretched so far. Episodes like the 'flamations' of Sodom were useful reference points during such a crisis, but they did not (and often could not) reflect the exactitude of that crisis.¹²⁶ For the destruction of Sodom was shoehorned into sermons for other national disasters too, such as plagues and floods. Ministers took the art of scriptural typology to 'dizzy new heights' as they attempted to make this biblical episode vaguely applicable to any national disaster.¹²⁷ To untrained ears and eyes, the scriptural comparisons forced upon urban fires, by ministers and minstrels, must have been indistinguishable. It would be hard not to believe that the repeated use of such Bible stories, by St Nicholas and others, had the

¹²³ Anon, *A relation of the most lamentable burning of the cittie of Corke, in the west of Ireland* (London: 1622), p. 2.

¹²⁴ Parsons, *Seasonable counsel*, p. 2, pp. 3-4.

¹²⁵ Ben Jonson, 'Bartholomew Fair', in *Ben Jonson. Volume VI, Bartholomew Fair, The Devil is an Ass, The Staple of News, The New Inn, The Magnetic Lady*, ed. by C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson and Evelyn Simpson, 9 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), V.1.6-13.

¹²⁶ Matthew Mead, *An appendix to Solomon's prescription for the removal of the pestilence enforcing the same from a consideration of the late dreadful judgement by fire* (London: 1667), p. 20.

¹²⁷ Walsham, *Providence*, p. 285, also cf., p. 299.

unintended effect of desensitising readers to, if not cheapening the plight of, the victims of these atrocities.

Churches: Spared or Burned

Another way urban fire narratives assigned culpability was by drawing attention to which buildings had been destroyed and which had been spared. The most important pointer, and often remarked upon, was the fate of churches. Writers found deep significance in what happened to God's temples during conflagrations and drew moral lessons from them. This was because there was a biblical precedent for God's destroying his own places of worship as part of His scourge by fire,

(Lamentations 2.6) And he hath violently taken away his tabernacle... he hath destroyed his places of the assembly: the Lord hath caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion, and hath despised in the indignation of his anger the king and the priest.¹²⁸

Though few urban fire writers quoted this scripture, they were aware of its message. To many the loss of these 'places of the assembly' was a horrifying prospect. Many assumed that, because built on consecrated ground, God's temples would survive any urban conflagrations. Many cherished the idea that God would protect and shelter those who to 'Temple[s] soon do flye/For Refuge' during such disasters.¹²⁹

London's 'incendium' was to be different.¹³⁰ To many, the 'startling and astonishing news' was not so much that the city was ablaze, but that its churches were too.¹³¹ Three years after the disaster, Christopher Flower, the vicar of St Mary's, Reading, recalled in the annual fast sermon for the blaze, 'Churches now prov'd no Sanctuaries as in the time of other Fires: I may adde, it was an amazing Judgment, which deluded People, and deprived them of the use of their reason'.¹³² Flower's sentiments were perhaps inspired by those of Simon Ford, vicar of St Lawrence,

¹²⁸ Other biblical passages included Leviticus 26.31, 'And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation'.

¹²⁹ Joseph Guillim, *Akamaton pyr, or, The dreadful burning of London* (London: 1667), p. 9.

¹³⁰ Vincent, *Fire and brimstone from heaven*, p. 70.

¹³¹ Tabor, *Seasonable thoughts in sad times*, A4r.

¹³² Christopher Flower, *Mercy in the midst of judgment with a glimpse of, or a glance on, London's glorious resurrection like a Phoenix out of it's ashes* (London: 1669), p. 22.

Reading, who had co-authored an anti-Quaker pamphlet with Flower a decade before the Great Fire of London.¹³³ In his poem, 'The Conflagration of LONDON' (1667), Ford expressed the sheer shock at the burning of God's temples:

To *Churches*, now in hast
Some flye for shelter, *ne're* were there *before*;
Others, to *mourn* they ne're shall *see* them more.
The *flames* even *them*, with th' *owners leave*, surprise,
Nor was't then *Sacriledg*, but *Sacrifice*.¹³⁴

The trauma of so many churches burning (eighty-nine to be exact) was palpable in dissenter descriptions of the fire.¹³⁵ In his chronicle of the city's inferno, Thomas Vincent was exasperated, 'But if houses for sin alone were sunk, and fuel for lust only were consumed, it would not be so much: but the houses also for Gods Worship (which formerly were a bulwark against the Fire)... now are devoured by the flames'.¹³⁶ Religious conservatives like John Allison were incensed at the encompassing damage of the inferno. His verse *Upon the late Lamentable Accident of the Fire in the Famous City of London* (1667) raged at how the blaze,

Its fury still increas'd, and all
Houses and Churches undistinguisht fall.¹³⁷

Urban fire writers did not just record, but often took providential meaning from these losses. Predictably, these meanings differed drastically depending on the author's own religious and political leanings. St Nicholas interpreted the burning of so many

¹³³ Cf., Barry Till, 'Ford, Simon (1618/19–1699)', *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, September 2004.

¹³⁴ Simon Ford, *Three poems relating to the late dreadful destruction of the city of London by fire* (London: 1667), p. 18. This was confirmed by Pepys who wrote in his diary, 'And to see the churches all filling with goods by people who themselves should have been quietly there at this time' (Pepys, *Diary*, ed. by Latham and Matthews, VII, p. 279).

¹³⁵ For an account of the destruction of churches see Porter, *The Great Fire*, p. 39, pp. 46–47, p. 49, p. 51. The total loss of property damage was extreme. It was estimated at ten million pounds, at a time when the city's annual income was approximately twelve thousand pounds. Cf., Hugh Clout, ed., *The Times History of London* (New York: Times Books, 2004), p. 68. This was much higher than the average loss incurred to citizens of other urban fires during the seventeenth century. Cf., Porter, *The Great Fire*, pp. 73–74.

¹³⁶ Vincent, *Gods terrible voice in the city of London*, p. 31.

¹³⁷ Allison, *Upon the late Lamentable Accident of the Fire*, p. 10.

churches in the Great Fire as an indictment against the episcopal services of worship performed within them,

Hast not God justly now, by this sad stroke,
 Your civil and religious meetings broke.
 Yea, and your specious meeting places,
 With all their pompous things, to let you know
 He doth not tie himself to such as these
 For all their great supposed holiness?
 Now let you priests sit down and sadly ponder
 How good it is when God thus parts asunder
 Them and their people.¹³⁸

The nation's 'priests' with their 'pompous... supposed holiness' were the 'public persons' that St Nicholas had mentioned earlier, and against whom the city's fire was an obvious judgement. To dissenters like him, the Church of England's order of service, held in Catholic-like 'specious meeting places', was why God had decided to 'part... asunder' London churches. St Nicholas failed to explain, however, why God had also burnt the 'meeting places' of Independents and other non-conforming denominations within the capital.

Other writers viewed the desolation of the city's churches quite differently. Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* (1667) saw the burning of London's 'places of the assembly', some of which had been built before the Reformation, as a purging of their Catholic heritage,

The fugitive flames, chastis'd, went forth to prey
 On pious Structures, by our Fathers rear'd:
 By which to Heav'n they did affect the way,
 Ere Faith in Church-men without Works was heard¹³⁹

¹³⁸ St Nicholas, 'The Voice of the Rod, 1666', lines 129-137, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 133.

¹³⁹ John Dryden, 'Annus Mirabilis: The Year of Wonders, 1666', in *The Works of John Dryden, Vol. 1: Poems 1649-1680*, ed. by Edward Niles Hooker, H. T. Swedenberg, Jr, and Vinton A. Dearing, 20 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), I, pp. 47-105 (p. 100).

It is worth noting that such anti-Catholic sentiments were made long before Dryden's conversion to the Church of Rome in 1686.¹⁴⁰ In his poem 'On the Burning of LONDON' (1667), John Tabor blamed national profanity for the destruction of London's temples,

You would not come to Church a while ago,
No Churches now you have to come unto:
The Gates of Sion mourn'd 'cause few, or none
Would enter there, but now you make your mone,
And mourn for Sions gates, 'cause they are burn'd
With fire, and to a heap of ashes turn'd.
Sion before in silence did lament,
Because so few her solemn Feasts frequent
Now you may mourn in silence, sigh, and fast,
For that the places of her Feasts be wast:¹⁴¹

Tabor's remark that 'so few her solemn Feasts frequent' was a deliberate paraphrase of Lamentations 2.6, 'the Lord hath caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten'. This was to emphasize the enormity of England's sin in not keeping the Sabbath (something we shall return to later). Tabor's point was that the 'firing' of churches had been God's deliberate aim, not merely an unintended consequence, when the Almighty had 'that sinful City, sharply scourg'd' with a 'lawless fire'.¹⁴²

The broadside *Londoners Lamentation* (1666) saw the loss of churches as a sign against those who had not heeded Sunday sermons urging repentance:

Great Congregations made of sparks,
fill all the Churches in the Town,
That fly up like a Flock of Larks,
the Bells and Leads are melted down;

¹⁴⁰ Dryden's conversion to Catholicism cannot be dated precisely. Cf., Paul Hammond, 'Dryden, John (1631–1700)', *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, September 2004.

¹⁴¹ Tabor, *Seasonable thoughts in sad times*, pp. 38–39. Also cf., Rolle, *Shlohavot, or, The burning of London*, p. 43.

¹⁴² Tabor, *Seasonable thoughts in sad times*, p. 21, p. 28.

'Cause we from sin will not return,
Pulpits themselves in Ashes mourn.¹⁴³

In a wry inversion, it is the 'sparks' not parishioners that 'fill all the churches in the Town', and the 'pulpits' not the people that 'in Ashes mourn'. God would rather have his temples filled with His fire, the ballad implied, than a lukewarm and neglectful people. Thomas Doolittle, the ejected minister of St Alphege, London, (who after the Restoration took on Thomas Vincent, another chronicler of the London fire, as his assistant for a boarding-school in Bunhill Fields), preached that the fire was God's '*Rebukes for sin*' committed by the whole nation. This was why, Doolittle believed, that 'Churches and store-buildings could not stop the angry flames... till it had rode its circuit, appointed it by God'.¹⁴⁴ Of all the churches destroyed, the most lamented was St Paul's Cathedral. Though St Nicholas did not single out providential meaning from the burning of London's Cathedral, several other poets did.¹⁴⁵

Other urban fires during this period frequently determined meaning from the survival, rather than the loss, of churches. A pamphlet describing a fire in Bedminster in Dorsetshire in 1684 saw their local church, untouched by the flames, as a mark against the acquisitiveness of the town's tradesmen:

It began near the Church, which standing at a little distance from the Houses at the end of the Town, and the Winds carrying the Flames from it, received no damage, which else from the violence of the fire would have suffered in the same miserable and deplorable Calamity... [as] *all* the goods, shops and houses of some of the most substantial Tradesmen... the same persons who thought themselves happy in the

¹⁴³ Anon, *The Londoners lamentation. Wherein is contained a sorrowfull description of the dreadful fire which happened in Pudding-Lane* (London: 1666).

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Doolittle, *Rebukes for sin by God's burning anger, by the burning of London* (London: 1667), p. 39.

¹⁴⁵ Several rhymesters noted that St Pauls was destroyed by God to cleanse it from the desecration by Cromwell's men (who had used it as a horse stable) during the 1640s–1650s. Cf., Dryden, 'Annus Mirabilis', in *Works*, ed. by Hooker, Swedenberg and Dearing, I, p. 101; Tabor, *Seasonable thoughts in sad times*, p. 33; Guillim, *Akamaton pyr, or, The dreadful burning of London*, p. 10; John Wright, *Three poems of St. Paul's Cathedral* (London: 1697), p. 7. These accounts were all inspired by an earlier one. As William Dugdale noted during the time of Cromwell, 'the body of the Church has been frequently converted to a Horse quarter for Souldiers' (William Dugdale, *The History of St. Paul's Cathedral in London* (London: 1658), p. 173).

enjoyment of what their Good Husbandry had stored, in three hours saw all lost, and themselves the unhappy Objects of common Charity.¹⁴⁶

A similar message was drawn by one pamphleteer who related the devastating fire of Northampton in 1675. They keenly noted how the flames spared the exterior, but not the interior, of the town's biggest church, to signify:

St. Allhollowes, standing as it were in the heart of the Town, the people took for a sanctuary as well in a temporal as a spiritual sense, and all whole habitation were adjacent brought as many of their goods as possibly they could thither, but alas we see by wofull experience that this element spares not even those sanctify'd houses... for the seizing on it burn'd not the Church it self, but all that was in it.¹⁴⁷

By this, the writer posited that the greedy inhabitants may see and 'make their Supplication to him who is a consuming fire' – a paraphrase of Hebrews 12.29.¹⁴⁸

When a fire swept across Southwark in 1676 – whose damage in goods and property was estimated at the time to be around eighty-four thousand pounds – it was noted how St Thomas' and St Saviours' Church were 'through the gracious mercy of

¹⁴⁶ Anon, *Strange news of a most dreadful fire at Bedminster in Dorsetshire* (London: 1684), p. 2. Any buildings left untouched by an urban fire were interpreted as providential signs. Tiverton's 1598 fire had destroyed hundreds of the houses of 'the wealthiest men in the Towne', yet had left alone 'dwellings of poore and sillie men', 'a just punishment of god... for their unmercifulnesse' towards those in need (qtd. in Morgan, 'English Urban Fire Disasters', p. 275). When a fire broke out in Cottenham, Cambridgeshire in 1676, one chronicler related how 'Near the Church stands the house of an eminent Doctor in divinity' whose 'Barns, Stables, &c. were all burn'd', yet 'his dwelling house [was] saved'. This was taken as a sign that his 'spiritual labours' were more important than his 'earthly gains' (Anon, *A sad relation of a dreadful fire at Cottenham four miles distant from Cambridge it begun upon Saturday the 29th of April, 1676* (London: 1676), p. 4). Evelyn thanked God that the sparing of his house during the Great Fire of London, 'in the midst of all this ruin, was like Lot, in my little Zoar, safe and sound' (Evelyn, *Diary*, ed. by Dobson, II, p. 255). When a fire broke out in New-Market in 1683 one pamphlet noted that though 'the better half of the Town is Burned down', it was providence that allowed 'that side of the Town where the Kings House stands, is not touch'd' (J. S., *A letter from a gentleman at New-Market* (London: 1683), A1v). Wallington remarked that when a fire broke out in Marlborough in March 1644 'by the great providence of God, the fire did not burn any house down of those that held for the cause of God [i.e. Parliament], but all those that held with the enemies' (Wallington, *Historical Notices*, I, p. 137). These spared and safe spaces were no doubt inspired by the city of Zoar that Lot took refuge in as Sodom was consumed by heavenly fire (Genesis 19.22).

¹⁴⁷ Anon, *The late dreadful fire at Northampton*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁴⁸ Anon, *The late dreadful fire at Northampton*, p. 5. Urban fires were often blamed on the avarice of merchants in particular. Town fires were a sign of their eternal damnation if they did not turn away from their greed. James Michel wrote that 'When eternall fire do burn,/Then Merchantry shall mourn' (James Michel, *The spouse rejoycing over antichrist* (London: 1654), p. 13).

God' preserved because they were 'Monument[s] of Charity'. This was a mark against the un-charitableness of some of the town's inhabitants.¹⁴⁹ One broadside noted how a blaze at Edinburgh in 1700 avoided its Cathedral, but consumed surrounding houses, as sign of God's disapproval of the city's flagrant avarice:

And as if pinch't in narrow bounds it went,
S[t]reight for St *Geils*; but soon it did Repent,
And stayed at the *Statue*, thence did flee
North, wa[i]t[e]d to th' *Croce*, to serve it's Luxury¹⁵⁰

When fire from heaven rained down on Cork in the summer of 1622, all its churches 'were filled with people tormented with woe and terrour' as they watched their goods and 'houses round about the Churches flaming'.¹⁵¹ This was seen as a judgement against the city's sin of 'Usury, (the chiefest Daughter of Covetousnesse)'.¹⁵²

When churches were spared, it was a clarion call from God for the townsfolk to mind their heavenly (rather than their earthly) inheritance. Accounts asserted that God left His holy houses untouched, so that His people would mind them better. This concept had its roots in Elizabethan accounts. When a fire consumed Woburn, Bedford in September 1595 (a month prone to fires) one chronicler wrote how, 'Churche or temple yet standing there (thanks be to God) not much decayed or defaced, to the end the people might more diligently resorte and repaire thereto, and more fruitfully profite by the heauenly exercises there performed'.¹⁵³ What accounts sometimes neglected to mention was that the majority of churches which survived these fires did so because they were built of stone. By comparison, domestic dwellings were often made of wood with thatched roofs.¹⁵⁴

Churches served important symbolic as well as practical roles during city and town fires. If they were spared they became signs of God's mercy, sanctuaries sheltering the destitute and impoverished. If they were consumed by the flames they

¹⁴⁹ Anon, *A True narrative of the great and terrible fire in Southwark, on Fryday the 26th of May, 1676* (London: 1676), p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ Anon, *The dreadful voice of fire, begun at Edinburgh*, broadside.

¹⁵¹ Anon, *A relation of the most lamentable burning of the cittie of Corke, in the west of Ireland* (London: 1622), p. 5, p. 6.

¹⁵² Anon, *A relation of the most lamentable burning of the cittie of Corke*, p. 3.

¹⁵³ T. W., *A short, yet a true and faithfull narration of the fearefull fire that fell in the towne of Wooburne, in the countie of Bedford, on Saturday the 13. of September last, Anno. 1595* (London: 1595), p. 17.

¹⁵⁴ Cf., Porter, *The Great Fire*, pp. 12-15.

became symbols of God's unremitting wrath to the sinners (and their goods) burned within them. In the aftermath of urban fires, God's temples served as the conduit by which to interpret these disasters using scripture. Preachers, as we have seen, used their pulpits to cast various (and sometimes competing) explanations of who were responsible for these infernos. Their message was guaranteed a captive audience, as pews were packed after fires had ravaged parishes.¹⁵⁵

Yet balladeers, pamphleteers, and manuscript poets were no different. Men like St Nicholas sought to control the narrative of how these fires were interpreted. His poem, and those of others, saw themselves as 'national morality sermons' inseparable from, if no less powerful than, those delivered in cathedrals and churches across the country.¹⁵⁶ Like those plying the 'steeple monger's trade' of thundering admonitions, scripturalists like St Nicholas used the destruction or survival of God's 'meeting places' during urban fires to justify and promote their own partisan religious and political agendas.¹⁵⁷

Sabbath-Breakers

Though chroniclers identified different sinners as to blame for these fires, they often agreed on one overarching sin – Sabbath-breaking. As Johanna Harris has expertly shown, adherence to the Sabbath during this period was defined within a clear 'legal, covenantal, [and] ethical' context.¹⁵⁸ Urban fires were a severe punishment for a serious crime. This is because Sabbath-breaking broke the fourth commandment: 'Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy' (Exodus 20.8). Labouring or selling

¹⁵⁵ Pepys noted how four days after the London fire, his church at St Olave, Hart Street was packed, 'The church mighty full; but few of fashion, and most strangers' (Pepys, *Diary*, ed. by Latham and Matthews, VII, p. 282). Anne Halkett records in her manuscript how, 'This day both by the desire of our minister and magistrates we are to meet in the Lord's house (the house of prayer) to offer up jointly together praise to our God for the wonderful deliverance this town and the inhabitants have had from that dreadful fire which broke out on Monday night the 2d of May [1687]' (Halkett, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, 'Meditations', MS 6497, p. 279). It was common for church attendance to rise after any disaster (not just urban fires). After a bout of small pox broke out in Earls Colne, Essex in November 1681, Josselin records in his diary how 'quiet in our streets, persons forced to church about us' (Josselin, *Diary*, ed. by Macfarlane, p. 640). The same was as true for urban fires on the Continent. When a tempestuous thunderstorm appeared to set 'the cittye all on fire' in 'Holdt', Germany in 1616, one ballad described how 'the people unto Church/did generally repaire,/In-tending there unto the Lord/to sacrifice in prayer' (Anon, 'Miraculous newes from the cittie of Holdt in Germany', in *The Shirburn Ballads, 1585–1616*, ed. by Andrew Clark (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), pp. 76–80 (p. 77)).

¹⁵⁶ Walsham, *Providence*, p. 310.

¹⁵⁷ The phrase 'steeple monger's trade' can be found in, St Nicholas, 'God Speed the Plough' (1663), line 45, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 87.

¹⁵⁸ Harris, 'Lucy Robartes' "A meditation uppon the Lords day"', p. 16.

goods, doing household chores, travelling, absenteeism from church, neglecting individual piety, and even having sex on a Sunday were all considered as sinful and aggravating to God as adultery, murder and idolatry.¹⁵⁹ ‘Many fearfull examples of Gods Judgements by fire have in our dayes been shewed upon divers Towns’, the minatory pamphlet *The Sabbath Truly Sanctified* (1645) averred, ‘where the prophanation of the Lords day hath been openly countenanced’.¹⁶⁰ Such a punishment was clearly outlined in scripture:

(Jeremiah 17.27) But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.¹⁶¹

This passage appeared highly appropriate to observers of the Great Fire of London which, as St Nicholas states, took place on the ‘*Lord’s day, about two in the morning*’.¹⁶² St Nicholas blamed the fire on the persecutors of dissenters, those Established Church authorities, who spent their Sabbaths disrupting conventicles rather than worshipping in churches,

What snares and traps hast thou prepared for these!
 What hunting of them when their enemies please!
 What sport was it thy Sabbath days to spend
 In routing of their meetings, and to send

¹⁵⁹ Zachary Bogan, *A view of the threats and punishments recorded in the Scriptures, alphabetically composed with some briefe observations upon severall texts* (London: 1653), p. 551.

¹⁶⁰ A. B., *The Sabbath truly sanctified, or, Godly rules and directions for all sincere Christian professors, for the strict observation of the Lords Day before, at, and after the publike exercises of the church* (London: 1645), A4v.

¹⁶¹ The ‘firing’ of towns and cities was for communal Sabbath-breaking. However, under Mosaic law, individual Sabbath-breakers were to be stoned to death by the congregation (cf., Exodus 31.14; Numbers 15.35). Urban conflagrations were more conspicuous as judgements against collective Sabbath-breaking as the Almighty had commanded that no fire be kindled on that day (Richard Bernard, *The Bibles abstract and epitome* (London: 1642), p. 113). House fires were also the mark of swearers. Andrew Parsons wrote that ‘God threatneth, *Zach.* 5.4. to burn houses for swearing and forswearing’ (Parsons, *Seasonable counsel*, p. 10). Forest fires were also seen as acts of God as described in Ezekiel 20.47-8. Cf., William Prynne, *The first-[third] tome of an exact chronological vindication and historical demonstration* (London: 1665), A3v.

¹⁶² St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, preamble, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 130.

Pastor and people, young and old, by shoals,
 To nasty, costly jails and dirty holes!
 Has not God justly now, by this sad stroke,
 Your civil and religious meetings broke.¹⁶³

Once again, however, we find little agreement on who exactly the ‘Sabbath-breakers’ were. The culprits were as numerous as they were vague. Thomas Vincent stated that the fire which had ‘begun in the City on the Lords day did reprove *London[ers]*’ for being ‘*Sabbath breakers*’ as a sign of God’s ‘severe threatnings against them, Jer. 17. 27’. When its citizens were ‘carrying forth their goods, and lying in the fields’, with ‘grief and fear’ after the fire, they might recall how before it often they had ‘walked out into those fields on the Lords day’ for their ‘recreation’; when they should rather have been ‘hearing the word preached’.¹⁶⁴ Thomas Watson, the ejected minister of St Stephen Walbrook, London, had a similar explanation in his sermon on the blaze. After citing Jer. 17.27 he argued, ‘The dreadful Fire which brake out in *London* began on the Sabbath-day; as if God would tell us from Heaven, he was then punishing us for our Sabbath-profanation’, particularly those who had practised ‘idle recreations’ and ‘idle sports’.¹⁶⁵ The cosmopolitan clergyman William Gearing instructed his readers that ‘the profanation of the Lords day, *Jer. 17.27*’ was the reason for city’s inferno. He surmised that a love of money kept more people at work than at Sunday services. As a result, ‘a fire [was] kindled in your Gates... devouring the stately houses and Palaces’.¹⁶⁶ The Flintshire dissenter Philip Henry in his diary opined that ‘is there not someth. to bee observ’d in the circumstance of time that it began on the Sabbath day, as if the lords controversy w[i]th london was more particularly for prophaning that holy day’.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 123-130, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 133. Thomas Jolly, the nonconformist clergyman, confirmed such harassment in his diary entry for the Spring of 1683: ‘The apparant dangers wee were in of disturbance in day-meeting (on Sabbath especially)’. Government raids and dispersals of dissenter meetings were so frequent, Jolly adds, that ‘of our danger of being deprived of our priviledges, wholly made us meet in the evening and in the night-time mostly according to the example of the primitive christians, yet the lord refused not night comers his night meeters’ (Jolly, *Note-Book*, ed. by Fishwick, p. 54).

¹⁶⁴ Thomas Vincent, *God’s terrible voice in the city* (London: 1667), p. 145.

¹⁶⁵ Thomas Watson, *A body of practical divinity consisting of above one hundred seventy six sermons on the lesser catechism composed by the reverend assembly of divines at Westminster: with a supplement of some sermons on several texts of Scripture* (London: 1692), p. 348.

¹⁶⁶ Gearing, *God’s sovereignty displayed*, pp. 90-91.

¹⁶⁷ Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 193.

Other urban fires that occurred on the Sabbath inspired similar biblical readings. The town of Tiverton, Devonshire was often warned from the pulpit that, 'That God would bring some heavy judgement on the Towne, for their horrible profanation of the Lords day', occasioned chiefly by their preparations for 'the Market on the day following'.¹⁶⁸ The town was 'consumed with a sudden and fearfull fire' on Sunday 3 April 1598, by which *The Sabbath Truly Sanctified* warned, 'Let other Townes remember... and fear Gods threatnings, *Ier.* 17. 27'.¹⁶⁹ When a fire struck again in August 1612, the entry in the town's parish register read: 'They are blind who see not in this the finger of God, wherefore *fear God's threatenings*, *Jer.* c. 17. v. 27'.¹⁷⁰ The parish clergyman Andrew Parsons warned the inhabitants of Wem in Shropshire that the blaze which had swept their town on Sunday 3 March 1677 was caused by 'our profanation of the Sabbath, a Judgment particularly threatned for this sin, *Jer.* 17.27'.¹⁷¹ Hugh Clark preached on this scripture one Sunday to show how 'God used to be displeased with those which took liberty to prophane his holy day', in the market-town of Oundle in early 1630s Northamptonshire. The following Sunday, a stray spark from an ironsmith's anvil set alight the thatch of his forge, whereby 'both Shop, House, and all the Smiths goods were consumed in the fire'. As after the Dorchester fire of 1613, the town of Oundle soon mended its ways whereupon 'an eminent reformation [was] wrought amongst them'.¹⁷² Nehemiah Wallington observed that the fire that raged through Oxford in October 1644, destroying three hundred and thirty houses, was 'upon the Sabbath day, to shew the just judgment of God... *Jeremiah* xvii. 27'.¹⁷³ These scriptural notions were reinforced by at least one broadside that depicted Sabbath-breakers flailing in flames (Figure 10).

¹⁶⁸ A. B., *The Sabbath truly sanctified*, A4v.

¹⁶⁹ A. B., *The Sabbath truly sanctified*, A4v. Also see Samuel Clarke, *A mirrour or looking-glasse both for saints and sinners* (London: 1654), pp. 284-285.

¹⁷⁰ William Harding, *The History of Tiverton, in the County of Devon* (London: Whittaker and Co., 1845-47), p. 45. Also see Beard, *The Theatre of Gods Judgements*, p. 150, p. 420.

¹⁷¹ Parsons, *Seasonable counsel*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁷² Samuel Clarke, *The lives of two and twenty English divines* (London: 1660), p. 160, p. 161. However, as Ann Hughes has pointed out in the fires that plagued Stratford upon Avon, religious reformations after such disasters were also part of the more obvious 'motives of imposing discipline at a time of social unease' (Ann Hughes, 'Religion and Society in Stratford upon Avon, 1619-1638', *Midland History*, xix (1994), pp. 58-84 (p. 59)).

¹⁷³ Wallington reasoned that this was because one of the town's parsons, Giles Widdows, had 'often preached against the observation of the Lord's day' saying that 'dancing and playing was as necessary as preaching' (Wallington, *Historical Notices*, I, pp. 238-239). A pro-parliamentarian newsbook blamed the 'terrible fire' on a 'Piper of St Giles' who had provoked the 'wrath of the Almighty' by 'profaning the Sabbath day with his unhallowed minstrallry and debauched company' (Matthew Walbancke, *A diary, or, An exact journall faithfully communicating the most remarkable proceedings in both houses of Parliament*, 3-10/10/44 (London: 1644), p. 162).

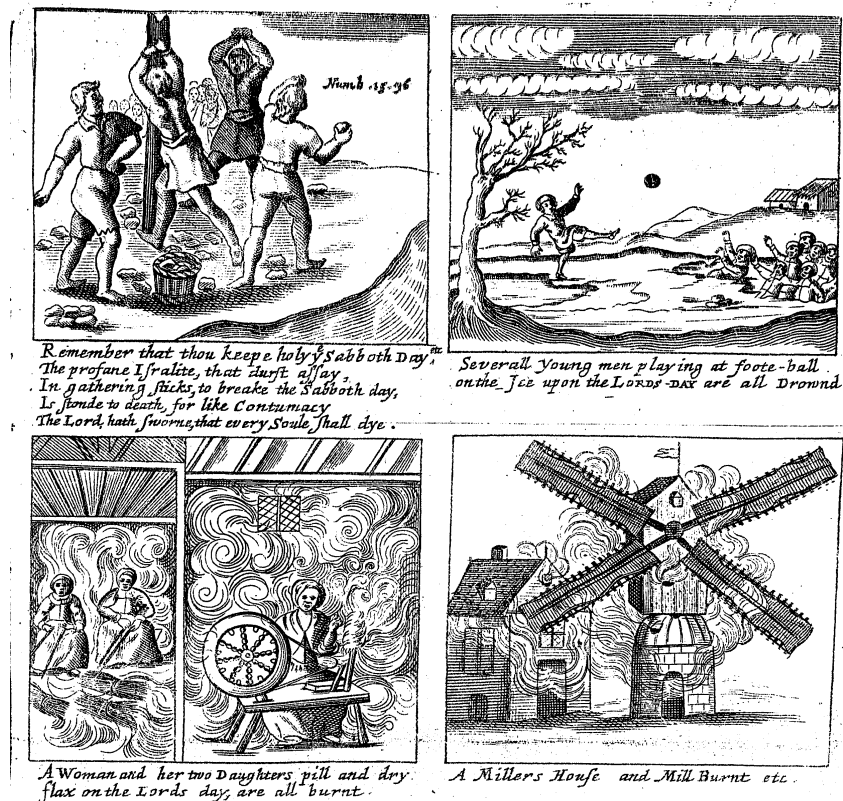


Figure 10. Images taken from Anon, *Divine examples of God's severe judgments upon Sabbath-breakers* (London: 1672), broadside. Of the four images depicted here, the first represents the Old Testament injunction to stone Sabbath-breakers based on Numbers 15.36. The bottom two represent stories of divine judgement upon Sabbath-breakers by fire which were linked to Jeremiah 17.27. These stories were well-known as they were repeated in earlier printed minatory works.¹⁷⁴

Such instances, recorded by St Nicholas and others, were meant to be forewarnings to Sabbath-breakers to cease and desist. As the Warwickshire theologian John Trapp commented, whether for town or person, such conflagrations were 'made an example, that will not take example by others', and who would 'not to be warned' by the 'presage' of such punishments in scripture.¹⁷⁵ The Church of England clergyman and royal chaplain Thomas Beard, in his highly popular *The Theatre of Gods*

¹⁷⁴ In particular, the flames visited upon the woman and her two daughters drying 'flax on the Lords day', were often retold as manifest judgements of Jeremiah 17.27. Cf., Hammond, *Gods judgements upon drunkards, swearers, and sabbath-breakers*, pp. 98-99; Bayly, *Practise of Pietie*, p. 549; Beard, *The Theatre of Gods Judgments*, p. 149.

¹⁷⁵ John Trapp, *A commentary or exposition upon the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job and Psalms wherein the text is explained* (London: 1657), p. 100.

Judgements (1597), argued that such examples demonstrated how those that, ‘had their bodies (even bones and all) burnt in a moment with visible fire’, served as judgements to reveal how ‘God is offended with the dishonour of so high a day’.¹⁷⁶ The frequency of these warnings, however, reminds us that such admonitions were rarely heeded for long. Moreover, as the Essex clergyman Ralph Josselin reflected in his diary in 1660, there were times when, to the bafflement of the godly, ‘people wonderfully neglect the Sabbath, and yett god holds his hand’.¹⁷⁷

Lamentations

Having identified the causes of fires, and the sins and sinners responsible, urban fire narratives then used scripture to describe the appropriate responses. They did this by citing from the lugubrious prophet Jeremiah and his effusive sorrow over the Babylonian sacking of Jerusalem in 587 BC recorded in the Book of Lamentations. Ballads and pamphlets on urban fires signified this biblical book through their titles, using variants such as ‘Lament’, ‘Lamentable’ and ‘Lamentation/s’.¹⁷⁸ This Biblicism is in many ways unsurprising. The ‘lamentations’ of Jeremiah were the exemplary biblical model for English poets like Donne, Herbert, and Milton.¹⁷⁹ As Walsham has shown, Stuart preachers also constantly turned to him during times of national peril or natural disaster. In their fiery ‘Jeremiads’, they would provoke and chastise their listeners to searing ‘anguish and sorrow’ for sin.¹⁸⁰ Beatrice Groves has also recently shown how the story of Jerusalem’s desolation was frequently re-told on the English stage during this period.¹⁸¹

Urban fire narratives were a part of this literary tradition. They were conspicuous in their borrowing from Lamentations in order to elicit the same sense of

¹⁷⁶ Beard, *The Theatre of Gods Judgements*, p. 150, pp. 149-150.

¹⁷⁷ Josselin, *Diary*, ed. by Macfarlane, p. 468.

¹⁷⁸ Cf., Anon, *A relation of the most lamentable burning of the cittie of Corke, in the west of Ireland* (London: 1622), p. 2; Anon, *The Londoners lamentation. Wherein is contained a sorrowfull description of the dreadful fire which happened in Pudding-Lane* (London: 1666); R. P., *London’s lamentations: or, some affectionate breathings forth on London’s late ruines by fire* (London: 1666); Anon, *A true narrative of a sad and lamentable fire which happened on Sunday, being the 27th of this instant January, in Temple Lane, London* (London: 1679); Anon, *Scotland’s lament for their misfortunes* (Edinburgh: 1700), broadside.

¹⁷⁹ Reuben Sánchez, *Typology and Iconography in Donne, Herbert, and Milton Fashioning the Self after Jeremiah* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 205-212.

¹⁸⁰ Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 283-287.

¹⁸¹ Beatrice Groves, *The Destruction of Jerusalem in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), pp. 165-186.

heartache that pulpits and players had induced for national or local tragedies. The most quoted was the opening of this sorrowful book:

(Lamentations 1.1, 2, 12, 16) How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow!... She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks... all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow... For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water

This was especially true for accounts of the ‘conquering flames’ that consumed London in 1666.¹⁸²

St Nicholas’ representation of the fire employed much of this scriptural *pathos*, or more specifically *penthos* – sorrow for sin. His scriptural citations were as free-flowing as the tears he attempts to placate,

Ah! for that prophet’s fountain now, that when
 No showers from heav’n, no industry of men,
 No water engines could prevail to stay
 The domineering of the flames that day
 [...]

 we can give in no relief
 And give but little other vent in grief
 When vessels are so full, in silence we
 May sit, and sigh our groans of sympathy
 May Bochimize the place with tears, bedew it.¹⁸³

St Nicholas had several biblical sorrow scenes in mind. From the ceaseless wailing of Jeremiah for the desolation of Jerusalem, ‘Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night’ (Jeremiah 9.1); to the personified Jerusalem as a weeping widow, who in ruins ‘sit[s] solitary’ and ‘weepeth sore in the night’ with rivers of ‘tears... on her cheeks’ (Lamentations 1.1, 2); and finally to when

¹⁸² Vincent, *God’s terrible voice in the city*, p. 65.

¹⁸³ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 15-18, 25-29, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 130.

an Angel rebukes Joshua for making a covenant with the Canaanites, and ‘the people lifted up their voice, and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim’ (Judges 2.4-5), the meaning of which the Geneva Bible glossed as ‘weeping’.

Other accounts of the Great Fire in verse also employed the visual cues of sorrow from Lamentations. They depicted the city and its citizens as a feminine and inverted *Magna Mater*, who looked on helplessly and sorrowfully at the desolate walls and crumbling city gates that had once sheltered them. Their aim, like St Nicholas’, was to demonstrate that such weeping was an appropriate and almost obligatory response to such fiery judgements. The poem *London’s Lamentations* (1666) was typical of this strategy, even citing its biblical inspiration ‘chapter and verse’,

How solitary does that City sit *Lam.1.1*
 Which so much people had alate in it!
 But as a Widow she is now become,
 Her Glory stain’d, and all her beauty gone,
 It is departed, and she’s so o’rethrown,
 That where her streets were scarce it can be known:
 Her wayes do mourn, her Gates are sunk, and she
 Hath made her dwellers elsewhere seek to be.¹⁸⁴

Like St Nicholas, this poem piled on the dolorous images, one after the other, by also quoting Jeremiah 9.1,

Come call for such as skilful are to weep:
 Tears can’t exceed, nor sighs be here too deep;
 Nor though our heads of waters fountains were,
 What might exhaust and draw them dry is here.¹⁸⁵

Samuel Wiseman also noted in his printed verse *Short and Serious Narrative of Londons Fatal Fire* (1667) how both those who witnessed the fire, and those who would

¹⁸⁴ R. P., *London’s lamentations*, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵ R. P., *London’s lamentations*, p. 1.

later see its effects, did and would weep. In paraphrasing Lamentations 1.12 he related how,

the heavy Eye
Of every watchful Mortal doth retain
A cloudy Sorrow, swol'n big with rain;
Tempestuous Sighs arise from every breast,
[...]
can you pass me by,
And yet not at my Ruines wet your eye?¹⁸⁶

The broadside *The Londoners Lamentation* (1666) envisaged a Jeremiah-like sea of national mourning,

Let water flow from every eye,
Of all good Subjects in the Land¹⁸⁷

Tabor's descriptions in 'On the Burning of LONDON' (1667) were equally melancholic. He equated the sullen posture of a burnt London to a 'solitary' and citizen-less Jerusalem as depicted in Lamentations 1.1:

And there you might behold with weeping eye,
By fire a whole Street, quickly ruin'd lye;
[...]
Now might you poor distressed people meet
With streams of tears lamenting in each Street:
[...]
How sits the City solitary, who
Was full of People only full of woe?¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Samuel Wiseman, *Short and Serious Narrative of Londons Fatal Fire with its Diurnal and Nocturnal Progression, from Sunday Morning (being) the Second of September, Anno Mirabili, 1666* (London: 1667), p. 7., p. 12.

¹⁸⁷ Anon, *The Londoners lamentation. Wherein is contained a sorrowfull description of the dreadful fire which happened in Pudding-Lane* (London: 1666).

¹⁸⁸ Tabor, *Seasonable thoughts in sad times*, p. 22, p. 23, p. 30.

Simon Ford added a postscript to his printed poem – ‘The Conflagration of London Poetically Described’ (1667) – which was the most explicit in explaining the strategy of eliciting such emotional responses from readers. He described how any narration of the Great Fire should allow readers to not only to ‘see’ the ‘flames’ and ‘hear’ the ‘cryes’ of weeping, but to ‘feel’ the trauma of those who had experienced it,

Londons Flames should so be set to view,
That those who see, in part my feel em too;
And even those that cannot see, may find
Th’ eye is not th’ only Glass that burns the mind.¹⁸⁹

Ford premised this kind of readerly exchange as being explicitly scriptural. He hoped that his verse would cause many to ‘weep with those that weep’ (a direct citation of Romans 12.15).¹⁹⁰ Or, as *London’s Lamentations* (1666) put it,

These desolations so behold doe we,
As yet we pity those on whom they be,
And so as with their tears a part we bear,¹⁹¹

Pamphleteers and preachers on the Great Fire of London employed the same emotional *penthos* using scripture. One treatise, written under the pseudonym of Rege Sincera, attempted similar biblical comparisons to London and the Book of Lamentations. ‘Now O *London!* it may well be said of thee’, Rege Sincera declared, ‘*How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people, how is she become widow, she that was great among the Nations, and Princess among the Provinces?* Jerem. Lam. chap. 1.1’.¹⁹² Equally, Owen Stockton, who had a thriving dissenting congregation in

¹⁸⁹ Ford, *Three poems relating to the late dreadful destruction of the city of London by fire*, p. 28.

¹⁹⁰ Ford, *Three poems relating to the late dreadful destruction of the city of London by fire*, p. 28. Romans 12.15 reads: ‘Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep’.

¹⁹¹ R. P., *London’s lamentations*, p. 5.

¹⁹² Rege Sincera, *Observations, both historical and moral, upon the burning of London, September 1666 with an account of the losses, and a most remarkable parallel between London and Mosco, both as to the plague and fire* (London: 1667), p. 17. ‘Rege Sincera’ was Latin for ‘the sound king’. This was perhaps a reference to Charles II’s descivie handling of the Great Fire. In the spirit of Lamentations 1.1, Nathaniel Hardy preached that London was the ‘*Mother-City of the Kingdom*’ for which ‘all the *Daughter-Cities*, yea, all the *People of the Land* take up a bitter wailing for this blow’ (Hardy, *Lamentation, mourning, and woe*, p. 25).

Colchester at the time, wrote in his treatise *Counsel to the Afflicted* (1667) that ‘*Londons Ruines call out to them as Jerusalem did in the day of her distress*’. Quoting Lamentations 1.12, and in the persona of a charred London, he asked, ‘*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by, behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger*’.¹⁹³ High churchman like Edward Stillingfleet, who was to become the bishop of Worcester, also employed such doleful scriptures.¹⁹⁴ This scripturalism may have stemmed from the fact that the BCP Service for the Great Fire used Lamentations 1.1 as part of the opening lines to its prescribed morning and evening prayers.¹⁹⁵

Like St Nicholas, ministers also employed Jeremiah 9.1, the ‘prophet’s fountain’ of tears, as an apt scriptural precedent for the tears to be shed over London. The metropolitan clergyman Robert Elborough preached, ‘*O London, what shall be done for thee, or how shall my heart be drawn out with compassion towards thee?... Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a Fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the ruine and destruction of the daughter of my people, Jer. 9. 1*’.¹⁹⁶ Nathaniel Hardy, dean of Rochester, preached at St. Martin-in-the-Fields the following Sunday after the fire, ‘*In times of general Calamity, we may well wish with Jeremy, That our head were waters, and our eyes fountains of tears to weep day and night*’, the marginal note read ‘*Jer. 9. 1*’.¹⁹⁷ Pepys acknowledged that though this was ‘a bad poor sermon’, its dolorous tone was ‘proper for the time’.¹⁹⁸ Waterhouse, said much the same as Hardy in his *Short Narrative of the Late Dreadful Fire* (1667). He remarked that the ‘*This Inscription of Gods fury on the Roll of her [London’s] Judgment,*’ was

¹⁹³ Preaching to the House of Commons on the day of the national fast held for the fire on 10 October 1666, Stockton exclaimed that ‘[the] *City* which now sits solitary like a *Widow*’ waiting to have her tears ‘wiped away’ (Stockton, *Counsel to the afflicted*, A4r). Though Stockton warned Londoners, using Lamentation 1.2 (‘*She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks*’), that ‘*Overmuch pondering upon our losses, will stir up grief and sorrow, and cause dejection*’ (p. 45).

¹⁹⁴ Edward Stillingfleet, *A sermon preached before the honourable House of Commons at St. Margarets Westminster, Octob. 10, 1666* (London: 1666), p. 36. Rolle went even further, stating that there was a ‘parallel betwixt the destruction of *Jerusalem* [in Lamentations] and of *London*’, arguing that ‘*Jerusalem, and London, were both fired in the same moneth, viz. Septemter*’ (Rolle, *Shlohavot, or, The burning of London*, p. 182 (mispaginated as p. 821)).

¹⁹⁵ Church of England, *A form of common prayer to be used on Wednesday the tenth day of October next, throughout the whole kingdom of England and dominion of Wales* (London: 1666), B4r, F2r.

¹⁹⁶ Elborough, *London’s calamity by fire*, p. 29 (mispaginated as 21).

¹⁹⁷ Hardy, *Lamentation, mourning, and woe*, p. 18.

¹⁹⁸ Pepys, *Diary*, ed. by Latham and Matthews, VII, p. 283.

‘Lamentation, and Mourning, and Woe’ which ‘ought to call’ its citizens to the rueful sobbing of ‘Jer. 9’.¹⁹⁹

The strategy of using scripture to induce compunction could be highly effective. Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick, after hearing a Jeremiad on the London fire wept uncontrollably. Returning home, she ‘with tears begged for mercy for poor England’.²⁰⁰ Pepys noted that when he attended the first Sunday service after the Great Fire, the parson, Daniel Milles ‘made a melancholy but good sermon’, adding that ‘many and most in the church cried, specially the women’.²⁰¹ Such was the mournful mood in London at the time that Pepys bought the ballad *London Mourning in A[s]hes* (1666).²⁰² Robert Frampton, later bishop of Gloucester, gave a sermon a fortnight after the London fire in which the king and courtiers cried publicly.²⁰³ When he read the news of the city’s inferno, Philip Henry recorded in his diary how ‘my heart [is] deeply affected with it’, whereby he vowed ‘to weep with those that weep’.²⁰⁴ Ralph Josselin wrote at the end of his diary entry for the blaze, ‘quis legens hoc temperet a lachrimis’ (‘Anyone reading this should refrain from tears’).²⁰⁵ Josselin’s remark presupposed the very tears it warned against. Perhaps he thought there had been too much weeping of late, and what was required now was dry eyes and sober reflection. This showed how entrenched a culture of weeping had become when descriptions of the London fire were read or heard. It was the Bible that both authorised, and was being used to author, these mournful responses.

Accounts of other urban fires, both earlier and later, continued to evoke outbursts of scriptural weeping. Some attempted to depict literal widows of Lamentations, mothers clutching their young, with husbands and fathers either dead or

¹⁹⁹ Waterhouse, *A short narrative of the late dreadful fire in London*, p. 108. Lewis Stuckley declared ‘O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night!’ because ‘Gods fury went out like Fire’ (Lewis Stuckley, *A gospel-glasse, representing the miscarriages of English professors, both in their personal and relative capacities..., or, A call from heaven to sinners and saints by repentance and reformation to prepare to meet God* (London: 1667), p. 449.

²⁰⁰ Rich, *Autobiography*, ed. by Croker, p. 222.

²⁰¹ Pepys, *Diary*, ed. by Latham and Matthews, VII, p. 282.

²⁰² Pepys, *Diary*, ed. by Latham and Matthews, VII, p. 285. Pepys also bought Marvell’s *Annus Mirabilis*, remarking that it was ‘a very good poem’ (Pepys, *Diary*, ed. by Latham and Matthews, VIII, p. 40).

²⁰³ Pepys, *Diary*, ed. by Latham and Matthews, VII, 316. This was as true for sermons delivered on other urban fires. In the spring of 1673, when Philip Henry preached at Newport on Psalm 9.17, ‘The wicked shall be turned into hell’, he noted in his diary that ‘many seem’d to be affected esp. at some reflections upon y^e late great fire in their town’ (Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 263).

²⁰⁴ Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 192.

²⁰⁵ Josselin, *Diary*, ed. by Macfarlane, p. 530.

absent. A broadside entitled *Northampton in Flames* (1675) related how a ‘fearfull Mother’:

Within her armes her youngest pledge she bore,
And fear’d much for *her* self, for *that* much more:
The *Child* looks on her with his watry Eyes,
And all those frights he could not speak he Cryes,²⁰⁶

This image played upon the notion of Northampton, like Jerusalem, as an assaulted ‘Mother’ and its inhabitants as her vulnerable, destitute and teary-eyed ‘Child[ren]’. Another ballad, describing a fire on London Bridge in 1633, anticipated as it expected a Jeremiah-like effusion of tears from its readers and listeners:

O, here begins my heauy tale of woe,
The which will force salt teares from eyes to flow,
I thinke there cannot be a heart so hard,
But to my subiect will have some regard.²⁰⁷

As did a ballad on the ‘miraculous fire’ that burnt much of Christ’s Church in Norwich in 1601. In a grand gesture the balladeer addressed ‘*Norfolke*’ as a bereft mother-province who grieved over the loss inflicted on its chief city:

Then can no creature choose but weepe,
this dolefull tale to heare
Norfolke thow hast great cause to weepe,
to sigh, and to lament:²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Anon, *Northampton in flames, or, Poem on the dreadful fire that happened there on Monday the 20th Septemb. 1675* (London: 1675). The image of crying babies and wailing mothers was quite common in fire narratives. Cf., Dryden, ‘Annus Mirabilis’, in *Works*, ed. by Hooker, Swedenberg and Dearing, I, p. 101.

²⁰⁷ Anon, [*Londons affright.*] [...] pitty, to all people that shall heare of it in [f]ull fire that hapned on London-Bridge [...] *To the tune of, Aime not too high* (London: 1633).

²⁰⁸ Anon, ‘A new Ballad of the most wonderfull and strange fall of Christ’s Church pinnacle in Norwich, the which was shaken downe by a thunder-clap... with a description of a miraculous fire’, in *The Shirburn Ballads, 1585–1616*, ed. by Andrew Clark (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), pp. 204–207 (p. 204).

Such ‘dolefull tale[s]’ harked back to the Elizabethan ballads on urban fires. When his house caught aflame in Beccles, Suffolk, in 1586 Thomas Deloney’s sorrowful posture, was an all too familiar (and crucially biblical) one,

With sobbing sighes and trickling teares my state I doe lament
Perceiuing how Gods heauie wrath against my sinnes is bent²⁰⁹

Prose chronicles in print were no different. When a fire swept across the town of Marlborough in 1653 (destroying more than two hundred houses), one pamphlet described ‘It would make a heart drop tears of blood that had but heard the dolefull cryes and heavy moanes’ of the destitute ‘Wives’ and ‘Children’.²¹⁰ A burnt Dorchester in 1613 was described as a ‘heape of ashes for travellers that by passe by to sigh at’ – a reference to Lamentations 1.12.²¹¹ Similar biblical invocations to weep followed the dreadful blaze that consumed the market-town of Wem.²¹²

Manuscript accounts also invoked the Book of Lamentations to legitimize not just weeping for, but the weeping caused by having witnessed an urban fire. ‘[M]y eyes did effect my heart’, Mary Rich wrote in her diary, when, in the aftermath of the Great Fire, she looked upon the ‘dismal prospect of that once famous city’.²¹³ Her remarks were a studied reference to Lamentations 3.51: ‘Mine eye affecteth mine heart because of all the daughters of my city’. Rich used this scripture to explain why the ‘mortifying

²⁰⁹ Thomas Deloney, *A proper new sonet declaring the lamentation [of Beckles in] Suffolke which was in the great winde upon S. Andrewes eue last, past most pittifully burned with fire, to the losse by elimation of twentie thousande pound and upward, and to the number of four score dwelling houses. 1586. Tow Wilsons tune* (London: 1586). As the flames spread to other dwellings in the town his tears became contagious; ‘Great was the crye that then was made among both great and small/The wemen wept and wrong their handes whose goods consumed all’.

²¹⁰ L. P., *Take heed in time: or, A briefe relation of many harmes which have of late been done by fire in Marlborough* (London: 1653), p. 9. When a fire broke out in Darlington, County Durham, one chronicler wrote that the sight of burning houses ‘might have made a stony heart to weepe’ (Anon, *Lamentable news from the towne of Darnton* (London: 1585), p. 8).

²¹¹ Hilliard, *Fire from Heaven*, C4v.

²¹² Andrew Parsons equated his response (and in so doing that of his readers) to Nehemiah when he had been told of the destruction of Jerusalem: ‘when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days’ (Nehemiah 1.4). Parsons concluded, paraphrasing Joel 2.3, 12, that once a ‘Fire devoured’ a town or city, the ‘voice of the Lord comes after, saying, *Turn unto me with fasting, weeping, and mourning*’ (Parsons, *Seasonable counsel*, p. 1, p. 45).

²¹³ Mary E. Palgrave, *Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick (1625–1678)* (London: 1901), p. 222. Raymond A. Anselment argues that such acts of compunction were because it was ‘a sin not to weep’ for the nation’s as well as one’s own sins. Raymond A. Anselment, ‘Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick, and the Gift of Tears’, *The Seventeenth Century*, 22 (2007), pp. 336–357 (p. 343).

sight' resulted in 'many tears' as she 'wept over' the ashy ruins of London.²¹⁴ When recalling her 'discomposed thoughts' caused by a fire she witnessed at 'Rodes', near Dunfermline in 1687, Anne Halkett, like Rich before her, compared her experience to Lamentations 3.51,

The prophet Jeremiah says in his Lamentation mine eye affecteth my heart. I found this true in this last night twelve month for the dreadful fire which I saw with my eye did so much affect my heart that I was even overwhelmed with it and made incapable of the exercise either of faith or reason.²¹⁵

Both Halkett and Rich relied on the scriptural precedent of weeping over a burnt city in order to defend their effusive expressions of sorrow. It is, however, worth noting that accounts of urban fires chronicled the weeping of men just as much as women.²¹⁶ Edward Pearse described the survivors of the Northampton fire in September 1675, their 'Eye-lashes hung with Mortar made of Tears and Dust blown into them', and how the men especially were 'apt to Tears'.²¹⁷ Many accounts of the Great Fire recalled the 'Pious Tears' shed by Charles II that his subjects were meant to imitate.²¹⁸ These tears demonstrate not just true repentance, but also how horrific and disturbing urban conflagrations really were. Something of the trauma of these fires can be glimpsed in the vivid woodcut illustrations that were used to depict them.²¹⁹

Such sorrowful expressions were part of the literary tradition of other providential accounts which, as Walsham has argued, deliberately evoked the

²¹⁴ Palgrave, *Mary Rich*, p. 222, p. 224. In the aftermath of the Great Fire, other visitors to London described similar feelings. See Pepys, *Diary*, ed. by Latham and Matthews, VII, p. 291; John Worthington, *The Diary and Correspondence of Dr. John Worthington*, ed. by James Crossley and Richard Copley Christie, 2 vols (Chetham Society, 1847), II, p. 212.

²¹⁵ Halkett, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, 'Meditations', MS 6497, f. 388r.

²¹⁶ Cf., Edward Pearse, *The state of Northampton* (London: 1675), 14. For representations of male crying and its appropriateness during this period, see Capp, 'Jesus Wept, but did the Englishman?', pp. 75-108.

²¹⁷ Pearse, *The state of Northampton*, p. 14.

²¹⁸ Cf., Guillim, *Akamaton pyr, or, The dreadful burning of London*, pp. 11-12; Abraham Markland, *Poems on His Majesties birth and restauration His Highness Prince Rupert's and His Grace the Duke of Albemarle's naval victories: the late great pestilence and fire of London* (London: 1667), p. 17; Dryden, 'Annus Mirabilis', in *Works*, ed. by Hooker, Swedenberg and Dearing, I, p. 95.

²¹⁹ See the woodcut frontispieces in D. Sterrie, *A briefe sonet declaring the lamentation of Beckles* (London: 1586); Anon, *The woefull and lamentable wast and spoile done by a suddaine fire in S. Edmonds-bury in Suffolke* (London: 1608).

‘lachrymose conventions of Scripture’.²²⁰ Walsham shows that these accounts revealed a distinctly Protestant variation on the medieval theme of holy tears and spiritual compunction.²²¹ Yet authors were not just attempting to induce national repentance for local tragedies. Rather, urban fire chroniclers like St Nicholas employed biblical models of sorrow for a variety of other reasons. Authors attempted to ‘weep with those that weep’ and ‘sigh out groans of sympathy... with tears’ for the victims of these fires.²²² Descriptions of crying were also used to counter the ‘cold Prayers’, ‘heartless Tears’ and ‘Vituperious Sarcasms’ of those who read or heard about these tragedies.²²³ Perhaps most importantly, the pious tears of ‘weeping Jeremiahs’ were seen as necessary to assuaging further fiery judgements.²²⁴ However, the repetition of these rhetorical devices, the ‘dolefull cryes’, ‘trickling teares’ and ‘heavy moanes’, must have made it hard not to be somewhat numbed by these displays of sorrow.²²⁵ After all, as the poet John Crouch observed, though penitential, such ‘tears [were] shed too late/To quench... [the] Heats’ of any urban blaze.²²⁶

The Literary Culture of the Great Fire of London

Thus far we have examined St Nicholas’ poem in the context of urban fires narratives written across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We also need to examine whether there were any specific biblical motifs he and other writers used solely to describe the Great Fire of London.

²²⁰ Walsham, ‘Deciphering Divine Wrath’, in *Disaster, Death and the Emotions*, ed. by Spinks and Zika, p. 33.

²²¹ Walsham, ‘Deciphering Divine Wrath’, in *Disaster, Death and the Emotions*, ed. by Spinks and Zika, p. 33.

²²² Cf., Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 192; Ford, *Three poems relating to the late dreadful destruction of the city of London by fire*, p. 28; St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 28-29, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 130. Once again, these expressions of fellow-feeling were themselves taken from Romans 12.15: ‘Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep’.

²²³ Waterhouse, *A short narrative of the late dreadful fire in London*, p. 88.

²²⁴ Vincent, *Gods terrible voice in the city of London*, p. 25. This was the rhetoric of several other disaster narratives, especially those in verse, which emphasized that further destruction would fall upon England ‘Unless thy tears prevent it speedily’. See Anne Bradstreet, ‘A Dialogue between Old England and New’, in *Women Poets of the English Civil War*, ed. by Sarah C. E. Ross and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2018), pp. 47-58 (p. 50); St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 25-34, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 130-131; John Heydon, *Eugenius Theodidactus* (London: 1655), p. 65, George Wither, *His prophesie of our present calamity* (London: 1683), p. 4.

²²⁵ L. P., *Take heed in time*, p. 9; Thomas Deloney, *A proper new sonet declaring the lamentation [of Beckles in] Suffolke which was in the great winde upon S. Andrewes eue last, past most pittifully burned with fire* (London: 1586), broadside.

²²⁶ John Crouch, *Londineses lacrymae* (London: 1666), p. 3.

London had experienced a series of fires during the early modern period. These often appeared to fulfil the prophecies of poets, preachers and pamphleteers who declared God's punishment by flames for the city's sins.²²⁷ Typical were those remarks by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, who, locked in the Fleet in 1546, wrote 'A Satire Against the Citizens of London'. Critics have rightly seen Surrey's denunciation of the city's vices as more serious than satirical.²²⁸ Here he forewarned its inhabitants:

The flame of wrath shall on thee fall!
 With famine and pest lamentably
 Stricken shall be thy lechers all.
 Thy proud towers, and turrets high
 Enemies to God, beat stone from stone:
 Thine idols burnt that wrought iniquity:²²⁹

Surrey's later assertion in the poem, that such a fiery judgement was premised on the Bible (God 'Whose scourge for synn the Sreptures shew') was nothing new.²³⁰ Yet there was no greater literary outpouring on urban fires which invoked the 'Sreptures' than on that dismal conflagration in 1666, that fateful year of 'portent and disasters'.²³¹ As such, there were elements to St Nicholas' poem that pertained specifically to that blaze and to the other Bible-minded writers who chronicled it.

One of these was seeing the city's tragedy as equivalent to one of the ten plagues of Egypt. After a series of climatic disasters had left an obstreperous Pharaoh unmoved, Moses was once more commanded to go unto him,

(Exodus 9.13) the Lord said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning,
 and stand before Pharaoh, and tell him, Thus saith the Lord God of the
 Hebrews, Let my people go that they may serve me.

²²⁷ Gostelo, *The coming of God in mercy, in vengeance*, D2r-E1r; Halkett, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, 'Meditations', MS 6500, p. 222.

²²⁸ For an overview see Susan Brigden, 'Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, and the "Conjured League"', *The Historical Journal*, 37.3 (September 1994), pp. 507-537 (pp. 517-519).

²²⁹ Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, *Poems*, ed. by Emrys Jones (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1964), p. 33.

²³⁰ Howard, *Poems*, ed. by Jones, p. 33.

²³¹ Dryden, 'Annus Mirabilis', in *Works*, ed. by Hooker, Swedenberg and Dearing, I, p. 48.

When the ruler of Egypt promised but then revoked his decision to emancipate the Israelites (as he had done six times previously), Moses was commanded to send the seventh affliction upon the land – a hail of fire:

(Exodus 9.23-24) And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground; and the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous,²³²

Those like St Nicholas saw a clear parallel between this conflagration and the one which befell London. In the guise of Moses, St Nicholas writes,

Cries not this fiery voice aloud also,
 ‘Hearken, O England, *let my people go*
That they may serve me? Dost thou not yet know
 How near thou art to final overthrow?
 Break all their bonds, take off their yokes, recall
 Thy sharp edicts.²³³

Five lines later he seemingly figures the episcopal clergy, and their ‘sharp edicts’ against dissenters, as the ones to blame. St Nicholas sees them as akin to Pharaoh’s evil counsellors:

Tell England’s king these [dissenters] are the most faithful to him.
 Thin, chanting p[riest]s are those that will undo him.²³⁴

Closer inspection, however, of St Nicholas’ manuscript reveals another intended target. These lines were initially a pointed criticism of Charles II’s mistreatment of

²³² Such biblical calamities captured the imagination of English poets. Abraham Cowley versified this episode as foreshadowing the final consummation of the world by fire. In his ‘The *Plagues of Egypt*’ (1656) he wrote how the Egyptians upon seeing the rain of fire, ‘One would have thought, their *dreadful Day* to have seen,/The very *Hail*, and *Rain* itself had *kindled* been’ (Abraham Cowley, *Poems* (London: 1656), p. 58).

²³³ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 139-144, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 133, italics my emphasis.

²³⁴ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 149-150, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 133.

dissenters, rather than an extenuation of his behaviour. Originally, the second to last line of the above extract was meant to read,

Tell pharaoh these [dissenters] are men most faithful to him

In an act of *metanoia* – that is changing one’s mind – St Nicholas decided, along with the word ‘men’, to delete ‘pharaoh’ and replaced it with ‘England’s king’ written above it.²³⁵ The reason for this substitution was obvious: such a statement was potentially seditious and even treasonous. For if he had kept it, St Nicholas’ initial remark would have revealed how he saw Charles as being tantamount to an English ‘pharaoh’ responsible, like his biblical counterpart, for the divine judgement of ‘fire’ due to his ‘persecution’ of ‘harmless souls’ in the form of dissenters.²³⁶

St Nicholas was not the only dissenter to sail close to wind by such Biblicism. Philip Henry made a similar remark in his diary entry for the London fire. He postulated that due to the plight of ‘poor silenced Ministers’ such a judgement may ‘be a further voice to our Governors, like that to Phar[a]oh, saying *let my people goe that they may serve mee*, and if ye will not, behold thus & thus will I doe unto you’.²³⁷ In other words, Henry argues that the government incurred the wrath of God for prosecuting nonconformity, in effect, that the nation’s administration, judges, clerics and justices were to blame for the city’s fire. Their enforcement of such penal laws as the Act of Uniformity (1662) and the Conventicle Act (1664) had been the very

²³⁵ Davies, ‘Commentary’, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 409.

²³⁶ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 3, 80, 118, 119, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 130, p. 132, p. 133, p. 133.

²³⁷ Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 193, italics my emphasis. The diarist Oliver Freeman wrote that the London blaze was because ‘wee repent not of our Cruelty oppressions and prisoning gods servants until god delivered by an high hand as he did strack out of Egipt’ (Oliver Freeman, ‘Diary’, HRC 119, f. 24v, qtd. in Thorley, *Writing Illness and Identity*, p. 28). Without the allusion to Pharaoh, well-known dissenters like Richard Baxter also noted in his printed biography that the ‘Sin of Persecution, or silencing Christ’s Ministers’ was one of the major causes of ‘God’s just Judgment on the City’ (Baxter, *Reliquiae*, ed. by Sylvester, p. 17, p. 18, also see p. 162.). Episcopal divines like John Tabor provided the opposite opinion, that it was the people, not the rulers, who were to blame for the London fire. He stated in *Seasonable Thoughts in Sad Times* (1667):

O stubborn people! shall there ever rest
Spirits of Contradiction in your brest?
Hath God stamp’t his Authority upon
Your Governours, and do you think they’ve none?
Hath he said they are Gods, and will ye then
Give less respect to them, than other men? (p. 40).

instruments of ‘silenc[ing] Ministers’.²³⁸ These were laws which had threatened and angered both Henry and St Nicholas.²³⁹ Scripture, and Moses’ words in Exodus 9.13, had allowed dissenters to air those grievances through their writing.

Ironically, and perhaps fittingly to men like St Nicholas, one of the ‘public persons’ who was blamed for the fire was the mayor of London, Sir Thomas Bludworth. Bludworth came from a staunchly Royalist household which was loyal to the Established Church. In 1659 he refused to serve as a London sheriff under the parliamentary regime. After the Restoration, in June 1662 Bludworth became alderman for Portsoken ward, replacing William Love, a dissenter removed from office at the instigation of Charles II. When the fire struck the city in autumn of 1666, though Bludworth had not caused the inferno, his mis-management of the response to it did not go unnoticed. He was slow to react to, and overcome by, the severity of the situation. He prevaricated over orders to pull down the houses needed to create fire-breaks, famously remarking at the onset of the fire that a ‘woman might piss it out’.²⁴⁰ At the height of the disaster he is described as walking around ‘like a man spent’ and crying ‘like a fainting woman’.²⁴¹ After the fire he became an obvious target for ridicule and scorn. Pepys wrote, ‘[p]eople do all the world over cry out of the simplicity of my Lord Mayor in general, and more perticularly in this business of the fire, laying it all upon him’.²⁴² His incompetence was long remembered.²⁴³

²³⁸ Under the Act of Uniformity (1662) all clergy were required to have episcopal ordination and use only the BCP. Some 2500 dissenting ministers were ejected for refusing. The Conventicle Act (1664) penalized all religious meetings outside the church. Other legislative measures included the Five Mile Act (1665) which banned dissenting ministers from corporate towns. Cf., John Cannon and Robert Crowcroft, *The Oxford Companion to British History* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), p. 210.

²³⁹ St Nicholas describes his disgust at the raid and arrests made at a conventicle he was attending in 1663 in his poem, ‘Upon the Imprisonment of Mr Charles Nichols... For Preaching at a Private House’ (1663), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 93-96. Although this took place a year before the law against such meetings was passed, the Elizabethan Act of Uniformity (1559) was being used in the meantime to imprison those dissenters who attended such private meetings. St Nicholas’ disregard for the Act of Uniformity (1662) is clear in poems like, ‘On the Great Prelate’s Reading the Common Form of Burial’ (1665), in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 102-103. Philip Henry was one of the victims of the Act of Uniformity (1662) under Charles II. Cf., Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, pp. 119-122. He also records those imprisoned for breach of the Conventicle Act (1664). Cf., Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, pp. 157-158, p. 212. He registers his dismay at such punitive legislation. Cf., Henry, *Diaries*, ed. by M. Henry, p. 253, pp. 259-260.

²⁴⁰ Porter, *The Great Fire*, p. 35, pp. 58-59.

²⁴¹ Pepys, *Diary*, ed. by Latham and Matthews, VII, p. 280. For a much more detailed exploration of Bludworth’s response to the Great Fire of London, see Stephanie Trigg, ‘Samuel Pepys and the Great Fire of London: Trauma and Emotion, Private and Public’, in *Disaster, Death and the Emotions*, ed. by Spinks and Zika, pp. 341-356 (pp. 394-395).

²⁴² Pepys, *Diary*, ed. by Latham and Matthews, VII, p. 280.

²⁴³ Cf., Carol Hartley, ‘Bludworth, Sir Thomas (b. in or before 1623, d. 1682)’, *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2012; online edn, May 2012.

Other chronicles of the London fire, particularly by named authors in print, were very cautious about who their ‘pharaoh’ signified. Several blamed the ‘firing’ of the city on national rather than monarchical or governmental sin. In his tract, *God’s Sovereignty displayed* (1667) William Gearing, a minister of Cransden in Sussex, argued that Pharaoh had ‘promised to let *Israel* go’ that ‘they should serve the Lord’ in order to cease the disastrous blights on his people, only to have ‘hardened his heart’, reneged on his promise, and be ‘punished’ with more plagues. Likewise, God ‘suffered this late fire’ to be ‘kindled among you’, Gearing told his readers, because the nation like Pharaoh did ‘promise to let your sins go’, only to have ‘hardened your hearts, and refused to let your sins go’.²⁴⁴ Gearing dedicated this work to prominent M.P.s and his admonishments tended to be aimed at the public at large. Similarly, the ejected minister Samuel Rolle averred that just as ‘one of *Pharaoh*’s Plagues ended, [and] another began’, because he was still ‘*refusing to let Israel go*’; so too Rolle explained, a ‘terrible Plague is well known to have pre[c]eeded the burning of *London*’ because the city like Pharaoh had refused to ‘repent and reform’ after the fatal pestilence.²⁴⁵ Like Gearing, Rolle did not target the clerical or political elite, but the sinful masses.

These were sanitised and safe readings of the Exodus story, which explicated universal rather than specific guilt. If everyone was blameworthy, then no one single person was worthy of that blame. Yet writers in print were also wary of using scripture to assign specific targets for God’s ire, lest they themselves be targeted.

Both high and low churchmen, however, could agree on two things. Firstly, that the blaze had been part of a series of ‘plagues’ due to the nation’s, and specifically London’s, transgressions. Secondly, that without reformation the inferno that gripped London would not be the last, or worst, judgement to befall it. Writers drew on one scripture in particular to illustrate this:

(Ezekiel 15.7) I will set my face against them; they shall go out from one fire, and another fire shall devour them; and ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I set my face against them.

²⁴⁴ Gearing, *God’s sovereignty displayed*, p. 99.

²⁴⁵ Rolle, *Shlohavot, or, The burning of London*, p. 181.

St Nicholas expounds this passage in his verse, even citing the apposite scripture in the margins:

O that, when God so many ways hath tried,
 So many warnings given, such means applied
 To turn us to himself, and i'the last place
 Hath in this dreadful manner set his face *Ezek. 15.7*
 Against the nation, and hath made us go
 From fire to fire, that hath devourèd so²⁴⁶

The poet of *London's Lamentations* (1666) also invoked the same scripture to demonstrate what many other writers had observed: that London had endured one calamity by plague only to be punished by another of fire,

The former Fire was not quenched quite, *Pestilence.*
 Before another Fire breaks forth with might:
 The former that did much consume our men;
 Another dreadful Fire cometh then,
 And that consumes our houses and our goods,
 And nothing leaves but rubbish where they stood:
 And thus out of one Fire go do we, *Ezek. 15.7.*
 And with another Fire devour'd we be.²⁴⁷

Like St Nicholas, this ballad deliberately signposted readers to the scripture it was citing by placing it in the margins. Similarly, John Tabor in his poem 'On the Burning of LONDON' (1667), wrote of the Great Plague as a 'wasting fire' that produced a more severe scourge of 'Fire' that consumed the city,

Heav'n from the former with provoked ire
 Shed death among them, but from this a Fire,

²⁴⁶ St Nicholas, 'The Voice of the Rod, 1666', lines 75-80, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 132.

²⁴⁷ R. P., *London's lamentations*, p. 1.

A wasting fire: scarce had that Vial done
 Dropping down sickness, ere this woe begun,
 And all at once in flaming fury thrown
 On this great City, quickly burnt it down.²⁴⁸

Prose accounts also employed this scriptural reading. In his treatise *London's Calamity by Fire* (1666), the clergyman Robert Elborough reminded readers that after the Plague Londoners had pondered whether 'God hath now done with us', when in fact 'he hath power enough utterly to ruine and undoe us'. The Great Plague and fire of London, Elborough argued, were visible manifestations of God's Word: 'Ezek. 15. 7. *They shall go from one Fire, and another fire shall devour them*'.²⁴⁹ Rolle argued the 'Fire there spoken of' whether 'literal or analogical', was a moot point, for the calamities that had befallen London were equally 'terrible'.²⁵⁰ Lewis Stuckley, an ejected minister of Exeter, wrote in his treatise *A Gospel-Glasse* (1667) that this scripture illustrated the 'fearfull signs and tokens of his [God's] wrath' made manifest in how London like 'Jerusalem is made heaps'; because 'Gods fury went out like Fire', and 'burned that none could quench it'.²⁵¹ Waterhouse was somewhat unique in seeing this scripture as literal in that as 'was the case of *London*, the fire removed from in one place... to another', in effect from street to street as illustrated in the prophetic vision of Ezekiel 15.7.²⁵²

Writers of the London blaze then moved from a 'Hortatory part' to a 'Consolatory part' within their narratives.²⁵³ They expressed a hope that, for Londoners, though '[i]t is night with them' they may 'live to see the morning', though 'God has overthrown them' he will 'build them up again'.²⁵⁴ They did this by invoking the Phoenix's rise from the ashes. This image was as much biblical as mythological. For when the much-blighted Job discussed his assured prosperity, he remarked:

²⁴⁸ Tabor, *Seasonable thoughts in sad times*, pp. 19-20. Tabor's conception of plague as a 'wasting fire' was scriptural and widely shared. As Coppe had prophesied earlier, 'The plague of God... shall eat your flesh as it were fire, *Jam. 5. 1 to 7*' (Abiezer Coppe, 'A Second Fiery Flying Roll (1649)', in *Ranter Writings*, ed. by Smith, pp. 72-107 (p. 92)).

²⁴⁹ Elborough, *London's calamity by fire*, p. 21.

²⁵⁰ Elborough, *London's calamity by fire*, p. 21.

²⁵¹ Stuckley, *A gospel-glasse*, p. 449.

²⁵² Waterhouse, *A short narrative of the late dreadful fire in London*, p. 51.

²⁵³ Tabor, *Seasonable thoughts in sad times*, A4v.

²⁵⁴ Timothy Rogers, *A discourse concerning trouble of mind* (London: 1691), p. 388.

(Job 29.18) Then I said, I shall die in my [m]nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand.

Though the King James Bible read ‘sand’, English theologians were aware that one of the possible interpretations of the Hebrew word for it, ‘khole’, was ‘Phoenix’.²⁵⁵ The Greek Septuagint also translated ‘khole’ as ‘phoenix’ or ‘Phoenix’.²⁵⁶ Thus, this scripture could be translated as,

(Job 29.18) I shall die in my Nest, and multiply my dayes as the Phoenix.

This was not an unfamiliar reading to early modern Bible-readers.²⁵⁷ Typologically, divines likened ‘Christ to the Bird of the Sunne’, whereby the ‘Phenix that arises’ with ‘healing in his wings’ was a type of his, and by association the saints’, resurrection.²⁵⁸ Urban fire writers appropriated this biblical image to describe the rebirth and rebuilding of London.

St Nicholas reassured himself, and any potential readers that, though the city may lie in ‘rude heaps and ashes’,

God hereafter shall renew it,
Our tears may fructify the soil, help bring
Some hopeful crop after another spring.
Who knows what phoenix, when this age is past,
Out of these ashes may rise up at last?²⁵⁹

St Nicholas’ image of the ‘phoenix’ encompassed spiritual as much as urban renewal. Dryden, in the preface to his *Annus Mirabilis*, wrote of London, ‘You are now a *Phoenix* in her ashes, and, as far as Humanity can approach, a great Emblem of the

²⁵⁵ Richard Stock, *A learned and very usefull commentary upon the whole prophesie of Malachy* (London: 1641), p. 84.

²⁵⁶ Robert Dingley, *A sincere believer, comforted, and encouraged* (London: 1656), p. 270.

²⁵⁷ The son of Philip Henry, Matthew Henry, records his father as saying, ‘we will multiply our Days as that Bird, the *Phaenix*’ and cites this as ‘(referring to *Job* 29.18)’ (Matthew Henry, *An account of the life and death of Mr. Philip Henry, minister of the gospel near Whitechurch in Shropshire, who dy’d June 24, 1696, in the sixty fifth year of his age* (London: 1698), p. 161).

²⁵⁸ Dingley, *A sincere believer*, p. 271.

²⁵⁹ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 30-34, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 130-131.

suffering Deity'.²⁶⁰ He continued this image in a vision of the golden streets that would be laid out in Christopher Wren's new metropolis:

New deifi'd she from her fires does rise:
Her widening streets on new foundations trust,
And, opening, into larger parts she flies.²⁶¹

Tabor similarly wished,

As doth your City... bemone your woe.
Repent in dust, and ashes, as that lies,
And God will make it *Phoenix* like to rise
From Funeral ashes, *London* then shall yee
More glorious in its Resurrection see.²⁶²

The cosmopolitan poet, and Fellow of Brasenose College, Joseph Guillim stated in his verse,

Yet from her Ashes *Phoenix*-like did spring.
Another *Loyal London* to the King.
Thus from our Rum'd City may arise,
Another, whose high Towers may urge the Skies.²⁶³

John Crouch, who had previously penned several satirical, anti-parliamentarian pamphlets and Royalist newsbooks, was somewhat more partisan when he wrote,

Now *Loyal London* has full Ransome paid
For that *Defection* the *Disloyal* made:

²⁶⁰ Dryden, 'Annus Mirabilis', in *Works*, ed. by Hooker, Swedenberg and Dearing, I, p. 50.

²⁶¹ Dryden, 'Annus Mirabilis', in *Works*, ed. by Hooker, Swedenberg and Dearing, I, p. 103.

²⁶² Tabor, *Seasonable thoughts in sad times*, pp. 60-61.

²⁶³ Guillim, *Akamaton pyr, or, The dreadful burning of London*, p. 14, also cf., p. 8.

Whose *Ashes* hatch'd by a kind *Monarch's* breath,
 Shall rise a fairer *Phoenix* after Death.²⁶⁴

These expressions were shared by preachers as well as poets. Christopher Flower, preaching an anniversary sermon three years on from the Great Fire, stated 'it hath pleas'd Almighty God in his righteousness to take away from us our dear Habitations in which we so much delighted, we commit them to the ground, Earth to Earth, Ashes to Ashes, Rubbish to Rubbish, in sure and certain hope to see them to have such a Glorious Resurrection (like a Phoenix out of its Ashes) as shall create wonder in all that shall behold it'.²⁶⁵ The 'cry of Londoners', Rolle explained, was that they may have their 'London again, if that great City Phenix-like might but rise out of the ashes'.²⁶⁶ These statements were not only pertinent but prophetic. The anonymous poem *The Glories of London Surveyed* (1674) stated that despite the fire's devastation:

But see what willing hearts and hands can do,
 Out of the *Phenix* ashes springs anew,
 Nay, what is more miraculous I'll tell,
 It rose almost as quickly as it fell,²⁶⁷

This scriptural allusion persisted. It ensured that when Nicholas Barbon set up his insurance company, the Fire Office, in 1681, it was subsequently known as the 'Phoenix'.²⁶⁸

Such scriptural cues, shared across denominations and mediums, demonstrate the existence of a recognised literary culture of writing about the Great Fire of London. Though several of these authors did not see eye to eye ideologically, scripture allowed them a common ground of expression. This led to as many agreements and a shared frame of reference amongst them, as there were disagreements and sharp departures.

²⁶⁴ Crouch, *Londineses lacrymae*, p. 9. For his life see Jason McElligott, 'Crouch, John (b. c. 1615, d. in or after 1680)', *ODNB*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edn, September 2004.

²⁶⁵ Flower, *Mercy in the midst of judgment*, p. 24.

²⁶⁶ Rolle, *Shlohavot, or, The burning of London*, p. 33.

²⁶⁷ Anon, *Troja redeviva: or, The glories of London surveyed* (2nd edn., London: 1689), p. 1.

²⁶⁸ Thomas, *Decline of Magic*, p. 781.

Conclusion

The literary culture of urban fire narratives reveals the extent to which scripturalism connected ballads, poems, pamphlets and sermons on these tragedies. Manuscript poets like St Nicholas, and manuscript poems like his ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, were clearly aware of and shared in these literary values. This demonstrates how it would be wrong to assume that those who sat through and bought sermons on urban fires were denizens of a different cultural and religious universe from those who purchased the pamphlets and ballads on them.²⁶⁹

The efficacy of these accounts was twofold. On the one hand they, like the visual genre of the *paysages en flammes*, were vivid and dramatic in order to elicit certain emotional reactions from their readers and listeners.²⁷⁰ Joseph Guillim, when trying to explain his poetic representation of the Great Fire of London, stated that – though the image is always ‘an imperfect Draught’ when compared to the real thing – his poem serves as a ‘Remembrance to those, who though they felt something of its Effects, yet never saw anything of its terrors’.²⁷¹ On the other hand, fire narratives used scripture to reinforce nascent theological and typological associations. The scriptural elements embedded within these accounts, speak to the recognised scripturalism that writers were following.

Yet urban fire chronicles could also be distinct from, as well as identifying with, those of others. The same scriptures allowed writers to signify their participation in this literary practice, without having to sacrifice their own religious or political beliefs. Pliable exegetical readings, wit and conviction allowed writers like St Nicholas to sound the same as, but still be different from, the urban fire narratives of others. This enabled writers like him to smuggle their potentially radical opinions into their verse via the back door of God’s Word. This was part of a much wider trend in providential writing. As Walsham has argued, popular and cheap disaster narratives in print could, and did, serve ‘pious and polemical ends’ well into the seventeenth century.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ For scriptures that connected sermons and ballads more generally see; Walsham, *Providence*, p. 63.

²⁷⁰ The only difference being that viewers of such paintings were driven to touch the canvas to see if the flames they depicted were real or not. Cf., Monteyne, *The Printed Image in Early Modern London*, p. 122).

²⁷¹ Guillim, *Akamaton pyr, or, The dreadful burning of London*, p. 2.

²⁷² Collinson, Hunt and Walsham, ‘Religious Publishing in England, 1557–1640’, in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. by Barnard and McKenzie, IV, p. 34.

Scripture allowed authors to create causality out of coincidence, order out of randomness, to suit their own polemical ends. The Great Fire of London was an especially good example of this kind of interpretive bias. Accounts of it, as we have seen, had their own set of scriptural idioms, tropes and images which were conspicuously twisted to suit various points of view. Dissenters like St Nicholas hijacked biblical models of national repentance and used them for individual scapegoating. His manuscript medium allowed for what others saw as the ‘ripping up [of] old sores’ and score settling.²⁷³ Yet printed works were no better. Writers accused those who had accused them of causing the blaze. This ensured that no-one escaped blame for the fire: not priests, politicians, or ordinary citizens. Either way, the veil of scripture and a writer’s chosen medium, allowed, and in some ways determined, the alternating views of who was responsible for London’s conflagration. Where manuscript accounts tended to excoriate the political and clerical elite, printed accounts attacked religious minorities and political radicals.

Yet despite the interpretive freedom afforded to authors, urban fire narratives were constrained by irreconcilable contradictions. On the one hand, writers emphasized that only sinful cities were scourged by fire, which implied the existence of ‘godly cities’ which would go unscathed. Robert Jenison, master of Mary Magdalene Hospital and lecturer in Newcastle upon Tyne, said as much. He argued in *The Cities Safetie* (1630) that protection from divine punishment, (from plague, famine and the sword, from fire and flood), belonged peculiarly to ‘godly cities’. Jenison confidently asserted, ‘Doubtless, we belonging to godly cities, and being for our parts members thereof, shall escape... many dangers, and remain a quiet habitation’.²⁷⁴ Yet burning towns could also be described as examples not of a town’s own sin, but those of the nation. Edward Pearse, who ministered at Tavistock Abbey, wrote that Northampton’s conflagration was a ‘burning Beacon’ to give warning to other ‘Towns and Cities of Judgments that may suddenly invade them’, for their thus-far ‘tolerated Disobedience’.²⁷⁵ Here cities, even godly ones, could be punished by God’s fire as sacrificial proxies. Authors had to find ways to explain why fires could afflict the reformed ‘Genevas’ of Dorchester,

²⁷³ Tabor, *Seasonable thoughts in sad times*, B1v.

²⁷⁴ Robert Jenison, *The Cities Safetie* (London: 1630), p. 11, p. 29.

²⁷⁵ Pearse, *The state of Northampton*, pp. 6-7. ‘This judgement lighted upon them’, Hilliard said of the Southampton blaze, not because ‘their owne proper sinnes’ were ‘greater then ours’; but ‘for our example to call us to repentance’. Hilliard, *Fire from Heaven*, B1r. To Morgan, such statements were designed to depict ‘shared guilt and partial absolution’ (Morgan, ‘English Urban Fire Disasters’, p. 276).

Oundle and Warwick, just as much as flagrant ‘cesspits of sin’ such as Tiverton, Cork, Stratford and London.

There was a robust and formulaic literary culture for depicting urban fires in early modern England, but its reception and readership were thus not always straightforward. With many competing and conflicting issues at play, responses to urban fire accounts were always likely to be instinctive rather than predictable. For scripture could only be used so far to interpret such events. As Thomas Browne averred in *Christian Morals*, written during the 1670s but published later in 1716, though ‘Judgments have their Errands’ and ‘Mercies their Commissions’, sometimes, despite the best efforts of the godly, there seemed ‘so many Riddles in Providence’.²⁷⁶ Saints could only hope that the reasons behind urban fires would be fully revealed and resolved with the passage of time. It is in this vein that St Nicholas, ironically using a scripture to demonstrate the limits of his scriptural reading of the Great Fire of London, concludes his poem with the riddle of Judges 14.14:

Thus, ploughing with God’s heifer, might this nation
In this, or in some other generation,
Learn to unriddle Samson, and might say
(And that it may be so, let good men pray):
Out of this greedy eater, meat; and from
This strong affliction did much sweetness come.²⁷⁷

This echoed the sentiment of *London’s Lamentations* (1666), which equally hoped,

Oft warn’d we were before, but we took none;
O that by this now warn’d might be each one,
And let these losses not be lost in vain,
Nor let them be but turned into gain;
Out of the Eater let there come forth meet.

²⁷⁶ Sir Thomas Browne, ‘Christian Morals: PART III’, in *Sir Thomas Browne: Religio Medici and Other Works*, ed. by L. C. Martin (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1964), pp. 228-249 (pp. 230-231).

²⁷⁷ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 187-192, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 134. Judges 14.14 is Samson’s riddle to the Philistines which is described as, ‘And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle’.

And out o'th strong some sweetness let us get.
God would us teach by that which he hath done.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ R. P., *London's lamentations*, p. 3.

CONCLUSION

In this Conclusion I want to discuss the broader implications of St Nicholas' scripturalism. I will do this using several approaches. Firstly, I will briefly summarise the themes and findings of the thesis. This will allow me to then outline how St Nicholas' use of God's Word crossed a series of social, religious and political boundaries. This informs our understanding of his English Calvinism as less rigid, and his religious dissent as less uncompromising. Secondly, I will discuss the internal logic of St Nicholas' scripturalism. I will examine some of the same scriptures we have encountered that were employed in his other manuscript poems. This will allow us to see that his use of God's Word was meant to reference his other poetic works and not just the works of other authors. Thirdly, I will demonstrate how my findings on the writing of scripturalism concur with an emerging scholarship on the English Bible. Like this thesis, this scholarship is using biblical writings and readings to challenge established orthodoxies and redefine the political and religious divisions of early modern England.

Themes of Suffering, Sacred Songs and Providence

This thesis has examined some of the ways English Protestants depicted and dealt with adversity. Chapter One examined St Nicholas' prison verse epistle *For My Son* (1643). This demonstrated how prison narratives written during the seventeenth century saw political and religious prisoners describe the same scenes of carceral suffering. By invoking Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* and the scriptures used within it, inmates were able to re-present their present persecutions via a Protestant past. Writers linked moments of routine stripping, poor diet and dehydration, makeshift beds, overcrowded cells, and the suppression of communal prayers as important scenes which represented imprisonment in early modern England. In doing so, these accounts revealed a recognized literary culture of prison writing that connected prisoners biblically and historically. This furthers our understanding of the various ways the Bible and Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* were inculcated and propagated in prison accounts. Though it is hard to chart what impact this had upon English readers, it is easy to see what effect prison writers hoped to achieve by employing these shared textual elements. Scriptural

and Foxean allusions gave these prison narratives a robust authority that made their depictions powerful, popular and hard to dispute.

Chapter Two investigated St Nicholas' 'An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery out of a Dangerous Sickness' (1667) to reveal the shared strategies employed by other sickness narratives. These represented the devotions that people emulated during periods of illness and near death. Valetudinarians of every hue of Protestantism were shown as performing the same gestures, prayers, covenants, temperaments, expressions and attitudes to will-making in their sick chambers. We saw how scripture provided the biblical mandate for this behaviour which was practiced by high and low churchmen and women. Through their writing, those like St Nicholas were able to model and follow the literature of the *ars moriendi*. This allowed for acts of cross-denominational piety that transforms the way we think about the social and devotional rituals surrounding illness and dying in early modern England. Rather than being contested, I have shown how acts of biblically inspired sick-bed piety were broadly accepted and practised.

Both Chapters One and Two reveal the writing of suffering to be somewhat paradigmatic and predictable. This did not, and should not, lessen the suffering that these writers described and endured. Rather, people like St Nicholas had to use careful structuring and choice phrasing in order for their physical hardships to be acknowledged and validated.

This thesis has also explored how people used biblical songs. These could be employed as expressions of unity during moments of national triumph or to reaffirm partisan beliefs during moment of national crisis. Chapter Three looked at the psalm collages used within St Nicholas prison poem *For My Son*. It revealed how a culture of psalm reading and singing galvanised the parliamentarian movement during the 1640s. St Nicholas used specific psalms in line with other parliamentarian writers to convey solidarity and resistance during the national conflict. He revealed a recognised mode of anti-Royalist writing that politicised Davidic praise. This chapter also complicated the idea that the Roundheads held a simple belief in 'justification by success' and 'condemnation by defeat'. Instead, writers like St Nicholas saw the plight of Parliament's army during the summer of 1643 as an opportunity for a greater providential rescue. He used scripture to combat any sense that military defeat meant divine disfavour. Instead, he used God's Word to promote the hope of a future victory.

Chapter Four examined St Nicholas' Interregnum battle hymn 'An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... over the Dutch at Sea... 1652' (1653). I demonstrated how he was contributing to a recognised form of parliamentary victory praise. This took the form of battle hymns that for more than a decade employed key scriptural texts during the 1640s–1650s. In doing so, hymnologists could trumpet their military triumphs as signs of divine favour. The diversity of battle hymn writers – from Republicans to parish-church clergymen, to balladeers and Independents – reveals just how effective hymns were at holding together the broad-church movement that was parliamentarianism. This informs our understanding of the antecedents of later dissenting hymns, revealing why they were so popular with the diverse religious groups who chose to compose and sing them after the Restoration.

This thesis has also investigated the ways people experienced and explained providence in the seventeenth century – in particular the providence of urban fires. Chapter Five examined St Nicholas' 'The Voice of the Rod, 1666: Upon the Burning of the City of London'. His poem and its scriptural allusions were compared with the writings of other authors who wrote about the Great Fire and other urban conflagrations. Collectively, these writings were able to show that urban fires represented the continual ire of God against the sins of the nation. This chapter revealed a pervasive literary culture which ensured that pulpiteers and balladeers, conformers and dissenters, shared the same sentiments when moralising about these horrific events. St Nicholas' poem showed that there was much more that linked him to other writers than divided him from them, or them from one another. This tells us that those who bought sermons on urban conflagrations and those who purchased the pamphlets and ballads on them were denizens of the same religious culture of consumption.

Crossing Boundaries

What do these findings say about St Nicholas' use of the Bible? His use of scripture was by no means idiosyncratic, isolated or novel. Through a study of his poetry, this thesis has attempted to show how certain scriptures were integrated within (and integral to) the literary, religious and political values of various groups operating in seventeenth-century England.

My findings have highlighted the importance of re-examining the shared (rather than contested) Biblicism of early modern writers. On the one hand, the scripturalism

St Nicholas was engaging with frequently crossed long held and robustly defended divisions. It was practised in prose as well as verse, in manuscript as well as print. It broke gender and generational barriers. It was employed by both women and men, by young and old alike. Scripturalism traversed lay and clerical divides. Congregants, just as much as their ministers, used the same scriptures to describe key life events and moments. Scripturalism transgressed political and religious animosities. Baptists, Independents, Presbyterians, high churchmen, Fifth Monarchists, Levellers, Quakers, Royalists or Roundheads, all were connected by the biblical verses they chose to employ. On the other hand, our readings of St Nicholas' engagement with parliamentary psalms and battle hymns – and his dissenting attitudes to the Great Fire of London – have revealed how scripture could just as easily be politically partisan and religiously segregationist. This, however, was the dynamism of God's Word. The English Bible could simultaneously house competing and conflicting meanings, as well as shared and mutually agreed ones.

St Nicholas' verse has also demonstrated how the Bible crossed spatial boundaries. God's Word was not just for Sunday services. Scripture was invoked in sick-chambers, in prison cells, on battlefields, even on coach journeys.¹ It could bridge congregational and domestic forms of worship. It could link mourners or rejoicers across towns and cities. We have seen how certain scriptures were culturally porous, though their interpretation was not always homogenous. Ballads sung on the streets, newsbooks and printed treatises sold at St Paul's churchyard, sermons preached from pulpits, songs sung in meeting houses, diaries written in studies and manuscript verses composed in closets all used the same choice scriptural phrases to discern and describe significant events. This reveals the effectiveness of the Reformation's emphasis on 'practical divinity', that key scriptures could be applied to specific (if not everyday) situations.² Thus, despite his avowals to the contrary, the Biblicism within St Nicholas' verse proved that it could,

¹ For the biblical references in St Nicholas' coach poetry, see St Nicholas, 'A Meditation on the Way towards York... July 16, 1644', in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 37; St Nicholas, 'Upon the Way between Sherburn and York, June 1st, 1646', in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 38.

² Cf., Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 124-126; Edward Reynolds, *Israel's petition in time of trouble* (London: 1642), p. 27.

conduce

To private gain or public use.³

St Nicholas' biblical writing was a by-product of the printing revolution that had transformed the Bible during the Reformation. God's Word could be written down anywhere because it could be read anywhere. As Killeen and Smith argue, the 'Bible was read relentlessly, in public and private, in pulpit and pub, for its politics as much as its Christology. It is this pliability and familiarity that constitutes its importance'.⁴

We have also seen how the Bible was not the only text which exerted such a powerful influence over his and others' writing. A select group of religious texts, because they were considered just as authoritative as God's Word, had broad and popular appeal. Works such as Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, Andrewes, *A Manual of Directions for the Sick*, Calamy's *The Souldiers Pocket Bible*, Rous' *The Psalms of David*, Wither's *The British Appeals*, R. P.'s *London's Lamentations*, and the Church of England's BCP all helped shape St Nicholas' re-presentation of scripture and scriptural moments. St Nicholas' 'active' reading shows how lay readers did not only select texts written by their co-religionists and dismiss those of opposing faiths. Instead, scriptural ideas were freely circulated and shared by a host of different writers and divergent texts.

This thesis has also demonstrated the value of examining the literary output of a minor male poet. Far from being marginalised and ephemeral, St Nicholas' writings show him attuned to widely practised literary forms used by a variety of popular and elite writers. Though scholars have often contextualised minor manuscript miscellanies through the illuminative lens of gender, class, religion or politics, this thesis has shown how scripture broached rather than reinforced these divisions. This did not mean that writers like St Nicholas identified with his sexual, social, political or religious 'other'. Rather, scripturalism allowed him to dissociate the ideology (and identity) of an author from the scriptures used within their text. St Nicholas was not a passive copyist but actively re-interpreted biblical texts (even those used by his enemies). This was not hypocrisy or blasphemy. As he stated in one of his final poems 'Commendable Chemistry' (1667–1668), the godly were to

³ Thomas St Nicholas, 'Upon the Exercise of Poesy at Vacant Hours' (unknown), lines 15–16, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 3.

⁴ Killeen and Smith, "All other Bookes... are but Notes upon this": The Early Modern Bible', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c. 1530–1700*, ed. by Killeen, Smith and Willie, p. 12.

labour to extract, where'er they come,
 The sweetest honey from the bitterest bloom
 Virtue from vice, and artist-like to bring
 Some antidote from every poisonous thing.⁵

St Nicholas and English Calvinism

If scripturalism was a cross-denominational and cross-political trend, what does St Nicholas' use of it say about English Calvinism? As Kathleen Curtin argues, due to the Calvinist belief that God's saving call comes through the 'Word preached and read', interpretation of scripture lay at the crux of the Calvinist conception of salvation. It at once required the 'operation of the Holy Spirit on the heart' and mind of the reader, and the 'hard work of interpretation'.⁶ This tenet was taken to extremes during St Nicholas' lifetime by Levellers, Quakers and other religious radicals. These argued that every individual (with the aid of God's Spirit) held the key to deciphering God's Word. Yet St Nicholas did not, like William Walwyn in his *A Still and Soft Voice* (1647), express the doctrine of the self-authentication of scripture through the operation of the Holy Spirit alone.⁷ Rather St Nicholas had railed against the Quaker notion of the 'light within'.⁸ He asked God in 'Upon My Shaking Palsy' (1667–1668),

Fix thou my heart above that great mistake
 Of making Christ within me for to be
 My mediator betwixt God and me.⁹

Although St Nicholas remarked that he was 'kept a-going by/The engine of thy spirit', it was by no means the only voice he listened to.¹⁰

⁵ Thomas St Nicholas, 'Commendable Chemistry' (1667–1668), lines 41–44, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 166.

⁶ Cf., Kathleen Curtin, 'Jacobean Congregations and Controversies in Thomas Wilson's *Christian Dictionary* (1612)', *The Seventeenth Century*, 25.2 (2010), pp. 197–214 (p. 198).

⁷ Qtd. in Rachel Foxley, "'The wilderness of Tropes and Figures': Figuring Rhetoric in Leveller Pamphlets', *The Seventeenth Century*, 21.2 (2006), pp. 270–286 (p. 274).

⁸ St Nicholas, 'Upon My Shaking Palsy' (1667–1668), line 34, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 163.

⁹ St Nicholas, 'Upon My Shaking Palsy' (1667–1668), lines 18–20, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 163.

¹⁰ Thomas St Nicholas, 'Upon an Ironwork' (unknown), lines 17–18, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 7.

Calvinist writers like St Nicholas appear to have been acutely aware of the use of certain scriptures by other authors, regardless of whether they were his religious or political equals. His Biblicism did not emanate from the prompting of a quiet inner voice, but the public (and often printed) advice of others. As he stated in ‘A Return to the Echo’ (1663), his scripturalism came from the hours he spent in ‘sweet confinement’ reading in his study at his estate at Hoaden in Ash, Kent.¹¹ Here he could,

Converse with God, and with men too

[...]

With men, some living, absent yet

Ready t’advise when I think fit;

Some dead, yet living. All at hand¹²

These ‘larger volume[s]’ and ‘great book[s]’, St Nicholas opined, would ‘freely speak out their own sense’ and with their words ‘reason with me sway’.¹³ The scripturalism he and others practised demonstrated a social – rather than just a self-orientated – authentication of scripture. God’s Word was validated through mutual and not just internal attestation. Thus, my findings reveal how the meaning of the Bible was mediated through the writings of not just clerical but lay English Calvinists like St Nicholas.

St Nicholas and English Dissent

If scripturalism widened the textual influences St Nicholas was otherwise prone to as an English Calvinist, did it do the same for his religious beliefs as an English dissenter? An initial reading of his manuscript verse would seem to suggest otherwise. St Nicholas held firm convictions as an Independent – that is one who did not accept the Presbyterian or episcopal models of church hierarchy – and his use of scripture within his poetry reflects this. Much of his later verse (which I have not examined in this

¹¹ St Nicholas, ‘A Return to the Echo’ (1663), line 91, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 78.

¹² St Nicholas, ‘A Return to the Echo’ (1663), lines 78, 81-83, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 77.

¹³ St Nicholas, ‘A Return to the Echo’ (1663), lines 67, 68, 88, 90, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 77-78. On the Protestant conception, and prioritisation, of devotional treatises, godly biographies and histories as ‘living books’ see Samuel Page, *A godly learned exposition* (London: 1631), p. 178; William Ames, *A fresh suit against human ceremonies in God’s worship* (London: 1633); A1r; Matthew Poole, *Blasphemoktonia* (London: 1654), A5v.

thesis) reveals a deep sympathy towards the plight of his fellow dissenters. In the wake of the Restoration, as he witnessed the persecution of his brethren, his Independency grew fiercer and, as a result, more acerbic in its expression.

This ensured that he became critical, and even a little intolerant, of other religious groups. In 'Upon My Shaking Palsy' (1667–1668) he used 1 Cor 3.13 to describe the eternal damnation of Quakers, those 'grand mistakers', that 'their works, whereof so much they boast,/They shall all be consumed with fire, and lost'.¹⁴ In his 'On the Great Prelate's Reading the Common Form of Burial' (1665) he derided the 'pompous rites and funeral ohones' prescribed in the BCP burial service as akin to the worship of 'Diana' in ancient Ephesus as described in Acts 19.¹⁵ In 'Micah 6.9; The Voice of the Rod, 1665', he lampooned the episcopal clergy who had 'As Balaam' or like 'Saul/Pretended' to worship God when in fact they made His 'air pestiferous'.¹⁶ In the same poem he also took aim at the returning Royalist exiles, whom he saw as 'Romish'.¹⁷ They were responsible for Catholic 'whoredoms and adulteries' that had brought upon England the same plague described in 2 Samuel 24 that did 'sweep/Thousands away of David's sheep'; except this time it was a 'sickness brought from France or hell'.¹⁸ All of these examples illustrate how St Nicholas used scripture to reinforce his partisan religious beliefs.

By contrast, the poems I have examined in this thesis reveal a somewhat different man to the one depicted in these later 'fanatic meditation[s]'.¹⁹ With some exceptions, St Nicholas' use of scripture has shown him to be a more tolerant, cheerful and optimistic dissenter. Despite what he experienced as a prisoner of war in Pontefract Castle in 1643, Chapters One and Three showed him to have 'cheerfully... suffered' as a captive of the Royalists.²⁰ Chapters Four and Five evidenced how, in both national jubilation and national lamentation, he expressed fellow-feeling for his countrymen not

¹⁴ St Nicholas, 'Upon My Shaking Palsy' (1667–1668), lines 36, 45–46, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 164.

¹⁵ St Nicholas, 'On the Great Prelate's Reading the Common Form of Burial' (1665), lines 6, 38, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 102–103.

¹⁶ St Nicholas, 'Micah 6.9; The Voice of the Rod, 1665', lines 305, 140–141, 156, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 111, p. 107, p. 107. This showed that St Nicholas was not only anti-Catholic but, like many Englishmen at the time, Francophobic as well.

¹⁷ St Nicholas, 'Micah 6.9; The Voice of the Rod, 1665', lines 54, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 105.

¹⁸ St Nicholas, 'Micah 6.9; The Voice of the Rod, 1665', lines 164, 353–354, 166, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 107, p. 112, p. 107.

¹⁹ Thomas St Nicholas, 'Upon the Prison Meditation and Essays of My Dear Friend Mr Praise-God Barebone' (1664), line 33, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 101.

²⁰ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), line 630, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 28.

just his co-religionists. He showed pride in the Commonwealth navy that defended England, ‘the land/Of our nativity’, from the ‘Dutch leviathan’ in 1653; and he shared Jeremiah-like ‘groans of sympathy’ and ‘tears’ for those who had experienced the trauma of the Great Fire of London.²¹ Chapter Two showed the neighbourliness of ‘Old friends’ that supported him during his terrible fever.²² It revealed that his sick-bed piety had much in common with that of other faiths. Chapter One saw the camaraderie he shared with socially diffuse inmates during his difficult incarceration. He could exclaim without irony that, ‘We prayed, we laughed, we slept, we rose in peace’.²³

A picture emerges of a country gentleman, who is convivial, jocular and well-liked. St Nicholas’ description of his ‘aged nurse maid’ seems appropriate to him as man of ‘good reputation/For honest life and conversation’.²⁴ Despite his religion and politics, St Nicholas’ verse shows a profound awareness of diverse literary modes that he was willing to participate in, even if those modes were also being employed by those who thought – and during the Civil War fought – differently to him. St Nicholas’ poetry demonstrates that scripture was not always used for partisan ends in the writings of dissenters, but that God’s Word was capable of being trans-denominational and occasionally trans-political.

The Internal Logic of St Nicholas’ Scripturalism

What does scripturalism say about St Nicholas’ attitudes to scripture and devotional reading? He was a regular and comprehensive reader of the Bible. By my count, the paraphrased scriptures that appear in his manuscript miscellany (that spans more than four decades) are taken from more than two-thirds of the books of the Bible.²⁵ His ‘active’ reading of God’s Word only partly explains what influenced his writings. As we have seen, his poems were deliberately informed by the same ‘gospel conversations’

²¹ St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise by Occasion of the Great Victory... 1652’ (1653), lines 27-28, 24, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 45; St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, line 28, 29, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 130.

²² St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn of Praise upon My Recovery’ (1667), line 44, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 152.

²³ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), line 398, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 23.

²⁴ St Nicholas, ‘Upon Mr Benchkin, the Curate of Ash...1664’, lines 31-32, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 100.

²⁵ St Nicholas cites 46 out of the possible 66 books of the Bible. He does not appear to have cited: Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Joel, Obadiah, Nathan, Habakkuk, Haggai, Zachariah, Malachi, Galatians, Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, Titus, Philemon, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude. St Nicholas’ poems date from 1624-1668.

that other writers were having in their printed and manuscript works.²⁶ In drawing from these texts, St Nicholas wanted to give the impression that ‘ev’rywhere: all should [and did] accord/With the best rule, the sacred written word’.²⁷

Yet his scripturalism also retained its own internal logic that was separate from these external influences. An intriguing picture emerges when we examine the Biblicism across all his manuscript poems – not just a handful of them. Some of the same scriptures that I have examined in this thesis were re-used by St Nicholas in his other poems for different situations and to espouse different meanings. When read collectively rather than individually, these scriptures show a congruous and unified message that runs through St Nicholas’ manuscript poems.

Take for example St Nicholas’ comparison of the Great Fire of London to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (as described in Genesis 19.24-25):

think we see the dismal, fatal scheme
Of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the flashes
That laid those cities in rude heaps and ashes?²⁸

This, as I discussed in Chapter Five, was a widely shared biblical scene used to represent urban fires. This was not the first time St Nicholas had paraphrased this scripture. He employed the desolation of Sodom in an earlier poem entitled ‘Upon a Very Late, Cold, and Wet Spring, 1663’. He explained that in the light of the ‘roaring floods’ that year:

Is’t a wonder
That Sodom’s sins should draw down rain and thunder,
Fire-storms and brimstone, and with direful flashes
Reduce the land into rude heaps of ashes?²⁹

It may have appeared somewhat histrionic to compare waiting for ‘strawberries’ and ‘cherries [to be] ready’, in rains that had rendered ‘the highway... foul to pass’ in a

²⁶ St Nicholas, *My Ultimum Vale* (1668), line 214, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 171.

²⁷ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 97-98, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 132.

²⁸ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 6-8, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 130.

²⁹ Thomas St Nicholas, ‘Upon a Very Late, Cold, and Wet Spring, 1663’, lines 23, 48-51, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 71, p. 72.

‘late... spring’, to the flaming of Sodom.³⁰ St Nicholas, however, showed that his allusion to Sodom was not only appropriate at the time but prescient. For as we have seen, he re-used the ‘rude heaps of ashes’ of Sodom when he wrote his ‘Upon The Burning of the City of London’ three years later. This was no accident. It created a metanarrative which deliberately connected his poem on the flooding of 1663 to his poem on the Great Fire of 1666. He wanted to demonstrate that God had allowed London to burn because the Almighty’s earlier warning to repent and reform in sending ‘roaring floods’ had gone unheeded. By the recurrent image of the ‘rude heaps of ashes’ of Sodom, St Nicholas positioned himself as having identified the ‘wet spring’ as a message from God ‘To give us warning’ of the future conflagration to occur in London.³¹ This implied that St Nicholas ‘did foresee’ the future disaster that the heavy rains portended – whereas ‘great star-gazers’ and ‘figure-casters’ had not.³²

St Nicholas repeated this strategy elsewhere in his verse. As above, he used Sodom to connect a prophecy of destruction in one poem to its fulfilment in another. The earliest use of ‘Old Sodom’ in his manuscript verse was as a prophecy of God’s ‘like vengeance’ upon England for its offensive sins. In his ‘The Recreation of an Accountant... 1662’ (1663) he attempted to ‘Number... [his] sorrows’ for personal and national transgressions. These included:

Sorrows without – sorrows so much to see
 Dishonour put upon God’s majesty
 By blasphemies unheard of, and by all
 Sodom’s old sins that for like vengeance call;³³

Two years later, St Nicholas argued in ‘Micah 6.9; The Voice of the Rod, 1665’ that the Great Plague was God’s judgement upon the nation because England’s ‘cities would outvie/Old Sodom for impiety’.³⁴ The reference to ‘Old Sodom[’s]... impiety’ echoed

³⁰ St Nicholas, ‘Upon a Very Late, Cold, and Wet Spring, 1663’, lines 10, 25, 12, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 71.

³¹ St Nicholas, ‘Upon a Very Late, Cold, and Wet Spring, 1663’, line 6, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 71.

³² St Nicholas, ‘Upon a Very Late, Cold, and Wet Spring, 1663’, lines 11, 2, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 71.

³³ St Nicholas, ‘The Recreation of an Accountant... 1662’ (1663), lines 201-204, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 53.

³⁴ St Nicholas, ‘Micah 6.9; The Voice of The Rod, 1665’, lines 167-168, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 108.

as it validated the earlier phrase of ‘Sodom’s old sins’ in ‘The Recreation of an Accountant’. This was to evidence, both to himself and any readers of his poetry, that St Nicholas’ earlier prophecy had come true. The repeated use of Sodom does not simply show it as protean metonym for any local or national disaster. Instead, St Nicholas used it throughout his poems to weave a tale of God’s repeated warnings to spare England from further judgements. In doing so, St Nicholas revealed that he knew God’s will and could dexterously interpret those ‘signs above, [and] what shall fall out below’.³⁵

This should not be viewed as negative. The malleability of scripture meant that personal meanings and readings did not detract from its use in consensus building in early modern England. The strength of scripturalism relied on the fact that God’s Word was capable of containing both general and peculiar meanings depending on the context and topic being addressed. It could be both personal and communal at the same time.

We encounter this in St Nicholas’ use of Jeremiah 9.1, ‘Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears’. In his ‘An Hymn Of Praise Occasioned by... Deliverance... from... an Extraordinary Sudden Flood... 1663’, he cites Jeremiah 9.1 as a lament for sin. This is prompted when a public coach he was travelling in accidentally overturned near Weedon, Northamptonshire, due to heavy summer rains. St Nicholas cries:

O, that our heads as fountains were
To pour down streams of tears
For all the streams of sin that there
Brought on us all those fears.³⁶

In this example, the ‘streams of sin’ were plural (that ‘our heads... Brought on us’). Therefore, the contrite ‘streams of tears’ were both his own and that of his fellow passengers (the ‘seven persons in a coach’) that he describes involved in the accident.³⁷

³⁵ St Nicholas, ‘Upon a Very Late, Cold, and Wet Spring, 1663’, line 4, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 71.

³⁶ St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn Of Praise Occasioned by... Deliverance... from... an Extraordinary Sudden Flood... 1663’, lines 65-68, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 68.

³⁷ St Nicholas, ‘An Hymn Of Praise Occasioned by... Deliverance... from... an Extraordinary Sudden Flood... 1663’, lines taken from the title, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 66.

By contrast, ‘The Recreation of an Accountant... 1662’ (1663), uses Jeremiah 9.1 as a prompt to personal repentance:

[I] wish my head a fountain were of tears
To mourn for all my failings in those years³⁸

Any readers of his manuscript would instantly recognise that his individual sorrow for sin is linked scripturally to the communal mourning of sin in the hymn mentioned above. Four years later, St Nicholas uses Jeremiah 9.1 once more, this time to evoke national lamentation for the Great Fire of London. In his ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, he cries,

Ah! for that prophet’s fountain now, that when
No showers from heav’n, no industry of men,
No water engines could prevail to stay
The domineering of the flames that day³⁹

St Nicholas’ image of the ‘prophet’s fountain’ of tears connected it lexically and symbolically to the others used in his earlier poems. He created a cognitive thread that linked his repeated use of this biblical verse. This demonstrated how compunction was necessary for individual, communal and national sins. This scripturalism cast St Nicholas’ verse as a series of self-sermons which were variations on a shared theme.

St Nicholas’ use of a particular scripture could also shift to denote his affiliation to different political or religious groups. In Chapter Four we saw him use Psalm 44.11, ‘Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat; and hast scattered us among the heathen’, to explain the defeat of the parliamentary forces in the summer of 1643. He described in *For My Son* (1643) how ‘now all/Our forces scattered are’, and begs God to ‘Put life, make armies of these scattered ones’.⁴⁰ A year later he framed these defeats in similar terms in his ‘A Meditation on the Way towards York’ (1644), remarking how:

³⁸ St Nicholas, ‘The Recreation of an Accountant... 1662’ (1663), lines 241-242, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 54.

³⁹ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, lines 15-18, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 130.

⁴⁰ St Nicholas, *For My Son* (1643), line 584, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 27.

‘our army [is] shattered,/Our men like sheep upon the mountains scattered’.⁴¹ Yet more than two decades later he paraphrased this same scripture to signify persecuted dissenters: ejected clergymen and their dispossessed congregations. In ‘Micah 6.9; The Voice of The Rod, 1665’ he ruefully comments upon,

their wand’ring on the rocks,
The silent shepherds’ scattered flocks⁴²

The syncopated ‘scattered’ of Psalm 44.11 become (just like ‘Sodom’s old sins’) a flexible metonym – one which not only identified the persecutions of parliamentarians and dissenters, but associated these persecutions as being similar and even intertwined. Psalm 44, thus, gave St Nicholas a voice that encompassed the trials undergone by those who had transitioned from ‘Roundhead’ to ‘dissenter’. In these examples, St Nicholas’ use of the Bible was not static, but fluid. Though he adapted the same scriptures to suit the contexts in which he was writing, those scriptures were always in some way connected to their use in his other poems.

This is not to say that his employment of the same scriptures was always protean or interchangeable. Sometimes his Biblicism had a unique and unshifting purpose that lay at the very heart of his religious convictions. Here we encounter the inherent contradiction of scripturalism – that it could be just as denominationally exclusive as inclusive.

Take, for example, his use of the Old Testament references to ‘trumpets of silver’ (Numbers 10.1) and the ‘precious sons of Zion’ (Lamentations 4.2). He used these as a shorthand for his anger against the persecution of dissenting worship after the Restoration. In ‘The Recreation of an Accountant... 1662’ (1663) he described,

Sorrows to see the *precious sons of Sion*
Trampled upon more than the ground they lie on,
To see men’s posts and thresholds set on high
Above the posts of sacred majesty,

⁴¹ St Nicholas, ‘A Meditation on the Way towards York... July 16, 1644’, lines 5-6, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 37.

⁴² St Nicholas, ‘Micah 6.9; The Voice of The Rod, 1665’, lines 193-194, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 108.

*Trumpets of silver cast aside*⁴³

Three years later, in ‘Micah 6.9; The Voice of The Rod, 1665’, he was still saddened by these persecutions:

When shall those nicknames be left off
 Wherewith my *precious ones* ye scoff?
 When will it be you will not shame
 To own saints by their proper name?
 When shall my *silver trumpets* be
 Restored to use?⁴⁴

These biblical cues were continued laments for the suppression of what St Nicholas would later call, ‘[w]hat worship God would best accept’.⁴⁵ These scriptures were tied to the apologist writings of dissenting clergymen who defended their right to worship God ‘in spirit and truth’.⁴⁶ St Nicholas was making a point that the faith of a people could be identified by the praises they made. If the Word of God was truth, and dissenters worshipped using scriptural psalms and hymns, then English ‘saints’ had a right to question why Church authorities these ‘*precious ones*’ and their songs ‘ye scoff’.

What these examples show is that, in the ‘abstruser... strains’ of his verse, St Nicholas’ choice of scripture was not always straightforward.⁴⁷ His use of God’s Word was as much indexical as contextual, achieving added layers of meaning when read across his other poems. A distinct pattern emerges when we lay some of the above examples out as a table (Table 1).

⁴³ St Nicholas, ‘The Recreation of an Accountant... 1662’ (1663), lines 205-209, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 53, italics my emphasis.

⁴⁴ St Nicholas, ‘Micah 6.9; The Voice of The Rod, 1665’, lines 735-740, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, pp. 120-121, italics my emphasis.

⁴⁵ St Nicholas, ‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’, line 120, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 133.

⁴⁶ For the use of Lamentations 4.2 see Oliver Heywood, *Heart-treasure* (London: 1667), p. 237; Matthew Mead, *The good of early obedience* (London: 1683), p. 168; Benjamin Keach, *Christ alone the way to Heaven* (London: 1698), p. 68. For the use of Numbers 10.1, see Thomas Case, *Mount Pisgah, or, A prospect of heaven* (London: 1670), p. 82; Samuel Mather, *The figures or types of the Old Testament* (Dublin: 1683), pp. 549-552; Christopher Ness, *A compleat history and mystery of the Old and New Testament* (London: 1696), p. 132.

⁴⁷ St Nicholas, ‘Commendable Chemistry’ (1667–1668), lines 67-68, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 166.

	‘The Recreation of an Accountant... 1662’ (1663)	‘Micah 6.9; The Voice of The Rod, 1665’	‘The Voice of the Rod, 1666’
Genesis 19.24-25	lines 201-204	lines 167-168	lines 6-8
Jeremiah 9.1	lines 241-242		lines 15-18
Numbers 10.1, Lamentations 4.2	lines 205-209	lines 735-740	

Table 1. Table showing the intertextual use of scripture across some of St Nicholas’ poems.

Here his use of scripture is poetically intersectional – it criss-crosses and connects the same poems together. This sheds light on how St Nicholas composed his verse and potentially how he wanted it to be read. Scripture gave him a voice to justify his experiences and observations as part of a much grander historical and prophetic project. In doing so, his poems could serve as both historically contextualised stand-alone pieces and as references to one another that transcended a specific historical moment.

The multiplicity of meaning meant that St Nicholas’ scripturalism could be both at the periphery and centre of English Protestantism. This is why his post-Restoration verse was not solely determined by the scriptures used by dissenters. As his sickness hymn and Great Fire of London poem have shown, his Biblicism was shared by high and low churchmen alike. He used God’s Word to address individual, communal or national concerns. That was the simplicity and dexterity of the Bible. It could simultaneously convey specific as well as broad messages to those who could, and were meant to, understand them.

What does this tell us about the methodology underpinning St Nicholas’ scripturalism? He, like other scripturalists, often used two distinct and yet overlapping strategies in his devotional writings. The first was biblical literalism, a direct transference (or transplantation) of scripture. Like John Bunyan, the aim ‘was to re-oralize the Word’, to integrate not just the ethos but also the ‘distinctive vocabulary and idioms’ of the English Bible, into the living speech of a community.⁴⁸ The second was

⁴⁸ Thomas Frederick Webster, ‘Bunyan’s Oral Scripturalism: Adamic Language and Religious Culture after the English Revolution’, *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 54.10 (April, 1994), p. 2. When asked by William Foster, a Bedford lawyer who was active in prosecuting dissenters, if Bunyan

less paraphrastic and more exegetic. Much like John Milton's poetry, words could be 'glossed by the biblical text', rather than vice versa.⁴⁹ In being attentive to these strategies, St Nicholas was part of a practice of scripturalism that aimed at participating in a kind of textual communion. This was neither by a thorough imitation or parroted reflection of scriptural ideas, but rather a distillation of phrases, images, concepts and acts that crystallised his recorded experiences as distinctly his own and yet part of those recorded by others.

The Writing of Scripturalism: Its Contribution to Scholarship

How does St Nicholas' scripturalism, as a boundary-crossing literary trend, relate to current scholarship on the religious and political literature of early modern England? My findings challenge the preconceived notion that one's religion or politics was shaped by communities that deliberately demarcated themselves by idiosyncratic styles of writing.⁵⁰ Though denominations differed ideologically, sacramentally and doctrinally, I have shown that on some occasions they concurred scripturally. My studies have revealed how this was also true for at least one prominent political group. I have shown how parliamentarianism was itself a broad movement that brought its eclectic adherents together under the umbrella of God's Word.

Therefore, this thesis runs counter to the claim that there is still no single issue more central to early modern studies today than the 'definition and history of identity'.⁵¹ I have shown that any religious or political identity shaped by scripture was fluid. This is not to say that all the authors examined here used their writings as a kind of activism for inter-faith Biblicism. Instances of shared cross-denominational and cross-political piety were sometimes the unintended by-product of attempts to forge distinct (and

'understood the Scriptures literally', he replied 'those that was to be understood literally we understood them so; but for those that was to be understood other-wise, we endeavoured so to understand them' (John Bunyan, 'A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan (1665)', in *Grace Abounding With Other Spiritual Autobiographies*, ed. by John Stachniewski with Anita Pacheco (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), pp. 95-122 (p. 103).

⁴⁹ Phillip J. Donnelly, *Milton's Scriptural Reasoning: Narrative and Protestant Toleration* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), p. 1.

⁵⁰ Cf., Peter Lake and David Como, "'Orthodoxy" and Its Discontents: Dispute Settlement and the Production of "Consensus" in the London (Puritan) "Underground"', *Journal of British Studies*, 39.1 (January 2000), pp. 34-70; Rachel Adcock, *Baptist Women's Writings in Revolutionary Culture, 1640-1680* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), passim; Clement Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), passim.

⁵¹ Tredennick, 'Exteriority in Milton and Puritan Life Writing', p. 159.

seemingly separate) communities. Yet a shared scripturalism did not dilute, detract from or erode one's own religion or politics. Rather, what was presented as idiosyncratic piety was always in some way contiguous with (as it was adaptable to) the devotional aims of others in early modern England. Piety did not define people; it was people who defined their piety.

As Richard L. Greaves has argued, whilst there were substantive differences between religious groups in England, 'any terminology' which focuses on delineating these groups tends 'to mask the existence of individuals – perhaps in significant numbers' – who, by minimizing the differences, 'manifested a fluidity that mocks the historian's efforts to categorize'.⁵² Johanna Harris concurs with this view stating that, though 'classification is inevitable' amongst historians and literary scholars, such approaches tend to obfuscate how differing religious groups and their members 'transferred, straddled, or shared allegiances'.⁵³ Harris' own work on 'sectarian groups' has cogently shown how religious 'sectarians' in England actually 'constitutes a broader community', which though 'founded on a variety of dissenting opinions', was in many cases, 'united on many fundamental points and with much mutual sympathy'.⁵⁴ My thesis builds on this post-revisionist historiography by providing a study of how biblical ideas, idioms and cadences were shared, and not just contested, amongst religious groups in early modern England.

As I have shown, parliamentary prisoners during the 1640s and those religious radicals who Parliament imprisoned in the 1650s could both lament their meagre prison fare as one of 'bread and water' (inspired by 1 Kings 22.27), without being traitors to their causes. Independents could quote the quality of 'patience' (taken from Psalm 116.13) in their sick-bed accounts, just as Quakers and Baptists had, without any sense of guilt or compromise. To make sense of the Great Fire of London, dissenting clergymen could cite Jeremiah's lamentations for Jerusalem (taken from Lamentations 1), just as the special Prayer Book service for that fire had, without apparently incurring any accusation of conformity. In doing so, my thesis has shown that Bible-reading

⁵² Richard L. Greaves, "'That Kind of People': Late Stuart Radicals and their Manifestoes, a Functional Approach", in *English Radicalism, 1550–1850: Tradition or Fabrication?*, ed. by Glenn Burgess and Matthew Festenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), pp. 87–114 (p. 89).

⁵³ Johanna Harris, 'Sectarian Groups', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion*, ed. by Andrew Hiscock and Helen Wilcox (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017), pp. 431–447 (p. 438).

⁵⁴ Harris, 'Sectarian Groups', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion*, ed. by Hiscock and Wilcox, p. 438.

during this period was not, as Peter Stallybrass has asserted, ‘random access for specific purposes’, but rather deliberate access for shared purposes.⁵⁵

This connects with recent investigations which have shown the wide appeal of scripture across denominational and confessional divides. This emerging scholarship seeks to examine more closely biblical texts as unifying cultural artefacts.⁵⁶ DeLapp has called such shared Biblicism the ‘social imaginary’ whereby authors possessed a common hermeneutical approach which ‘was influenced by their common history as Protestants’.⁵⁷ This accords with Narveson’s discovery that increased ‘Scripture literacy licensed a new lay ownership of religion, a religion whose terrain extended into the streets and chambers of ordinary men and women’.⁵⁸

My research provides an alternative view to Narveson’s claim, however, that there existed a strong ‘clerical anxiety’ about the lay writing of scripture which, in some ways, propelled that writing.⁵⁹ There is no doubt that ministers were anxious about their congregants interpreting and understanding scripture correctly. St Nicholas, however, seemed to not have been aware of, or he was just not concerned by, this. Instead, he was content to repeat clerical advice from printed works in his own poems. He and other lay writers are frequently found indiscriminately copying and inserting the scriptural advice of ministers – episcopal and dissenter alike. This concurs with Alec Ryrie’s observation that the difference between ‘puritan and conformist Protestants... almost fades from view when examined through the lens of devotion and lived experience’.⁶⁰ Critics are beginning to recognise that religious discourses were shaped by inter-confessional acts of writing and reading.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Peter Stallybrass, ‘Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible’, in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*, ed. by Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 2002), pp. 42-79 (p. 46).

⁵⁶ Prescott, ‘A Year in the Life of King Saul: 1643’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c. 1530–1700*, ed. by Killeen, Smith and Willie, pp. 412-426; Hamlin, *Psalm Culture*, pp. 9-11; Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation*, pp. 25-55; DeLapp, *The Reformed David(s)*, pp. 165-190.

⁵⁷ DeLapp, *The Reformed David(s)*, p. 166.

⁵⁸ Narveson, *Bible Readers*, p. 200.

⁵⁹ Narveson, *Bible Readers*, pp. 199-215.

⁶⁰ Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, p. 6. Walsham extends this paradigm by asserting the value in scholarship that ‘examines Catholicism and anti-Catholicism, Protestantism and anti-Protestantism as inextricably linked bodies of opinion and practice, which exerted powerful reciprocal influence upon each other’ (Alexandra Walsham, *Catholic Reformation in Protestant Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 3).

⁶¹ Cf., Glenn Burgess, ‘Royalism and liberty of conscience in the English Revolution’, in *Liberty, Authority, Formality*, ed. by Morrow and Scott, pp. 9-28; Nicholas McDowell, ‘The Ghost in the Marble: Jeremy Taylor’s *Liberty of Prophesying* (1647) and its Readers’, in *Scripture and Scholarship in Early Modern England*, ed. by Ariel Hessayon and Nicholas Keene (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 176-191; C. Scott Dixon, Dagmar Freist and Mark Greengrass, eds., *Living with Religious Diversity in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); John Coffey, ‘European Multiconfessionalism and the English

My findings also coincide with a growing body of scholarship that seeks to identify the scriptural traces in early modern writing precisely because they have been forgotten. As Killeen has argued, the Bible's phraseology 'is contingent and mutable' and can shift to such an extent that it moves beyond the audible range of today's scholars, such that it almost 'stops sounding biblical' and starts sounding 'colloquial'.⁶² Such a forensic approach is being acknowledged as central to understanding the literary culture of early modern England. As Cummings has argued, it is the 'images and words' (scriptural or otherwise) used by 'minds in the past' that tell us more about their 'hopes and cares, passions and anxieties' that regulated an era, than 'their carefully elaborated systems of thought'.⁶³ My research has demonstrated the value of being attentive to the verbal cues of scriptures within the writings of seventeenth-century England. It was these images and words that shaped broad Protestant identities and affinities during times of imprisonment, sickness, war and local or national disasters. This approach allows us, as John Coffey has noted, to understand 'early modern religion in its own terms'.⁶⁴ By examining the biblical phrases of a minor male poet, my work has also sought to answer the calls of those like Sarah Ross, who finds 'biblical verse paraphrase under-examined as a poetic genre' in early modern England.⁶⁵

The influence of various political and religious texts upon St Nicholas' verse also confirms the findings of recent scholarship on the wide reading of manuscript poets. Jerome De Groot's observations on the texts that influenced Lucy Hutchinson's collection of manuscript verses are equally applicable to those that influenced St Nicholas. Once identified, textual influences, De Groot argues, ensure that manuscript verse 'has multiple meanings, and all of them both complicate our picture of reading and composing during this period and suggest that our models of allegiance and intellectual engagement can be further nuanced'.⁶⁶ St Nicholas' manuscript writing was not bi-polar – it did not either shelter or shun scriptural ideas – but it explored, re-

Toleration Controversy, 1640–1660', in *A Companion to Multiconfessionality in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Thomas Max Safley (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 341–366.

⁶² Killeen, *The Political Bible*, p. 26.

⁶³ Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts*, pp. 17–18; also see Worden, *God's Instruments*, pp. 13–32.

⁶⁴ John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Longman: London, 2000), p. 10.

⁶⁵ Sarah C. E. Ross, *Women, Poetry, and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), p. 67.

⁶⁶ De Groot, 'John Denham and Lucy Hutchinson's Commonplace Book', p. 160.

formed and connected them.⁶⁷ Narveson has shown that in the manuscript writing of women ‘devotional engagement with texts [can] be both communal and personal’.⁶⁸ The manuscript poems of St Nicholas were no different.

St Nicholas’ engagement with a vast amount of printed devotional works also confirms emerging scholarship on the interplay and influence between manuscript and printed texts. As Tenger and Trolande argue, print was not ‘unfriendly’ to modes of authorship and reading necessary to a ‘flourishing culture of manuscript’ composition and consumption in seventeenth-century England.⁶⁹ The Biblicism St Nicholas’ poems shared with both print and manuscript texts just confirms the repeated warnings by scholars ‘not to overlook one medium at the expense of the other’.⁷⁰

This scholarship, however, is not exhaustive and has left several questions unexplored. When it came to differing denominations, were the same psalms read out during possession cases, did husbands and wives say the same morning and evening prayers, was the prayer of grace said at supper and dinner times the same, did conversion and baptismal accounts share similar biblical phrasing? How did this Biblicism extend to the fields of horticulture, astrology, medicine, architecture, and the law? There is still much to uncover about how scripturalism was embedded in the daily regime of piety in post-Reformation England. As Ariel Hessayon and Nicholas Keene have recently posited, though the story of the English Bible has received much attention, the ‘story of the Bible in England, however, remains incomplete’.⁷¹

St Nicholas and His Legacy

This thesis has shown how English men and women used scripture within their self-writing as a record of God’s work within their lives – and their lives as a record of work towards God. They were not those who, as Jonathan Swift argued, ‘without any

⁶⁷ Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993), p. 185, pp. 292-293.

⁶⁸ Narveson, *Bible Readers*, p. 79.

⁶⁹ Tenger and Trolande, ‘From Print versus Manuscript to Sociable Authorship and Mixed Media’, p. 1040.

⁷⁰ Tenger and Trolande, ‘From Print versus Manuscript to Sociable Authorship and Mixed Media’, p. 1043.

⁷¹ Ariel Hessayon and Nicholas Keene, ‘Introduction’, in *Scripture and Scholarship*, ed. by Hessayon and Keene, pp. 1-4 (p. 2).

Ceremony, will run over the History of their Lives'.⁷² Instead their writings were vital (or potentially fatal) accounts of how they had lived – to be presented to an eternal judge. Scripturalism provided the perfect way to do this: what better way to justify one's actions before God than by using his own Holy Word.⁷³ In this sense, today's scholars read autobiographical and prosopographical works of early modern England as they were intended – as evidence of how their subjects lived out their faith.

Margaret Ezell compares the survival of such documents to flies in amber. Such glimpses, Ezell asserts, of a 'long since deceased literary landscape', ensure a 'continuation of that presence which survives destruction, that matter which the living are permitted still to embrace'.⁷⁴ This notion is not a modern symptom of nostalgia for the past. When reading the wills of his ancient Catholic ancestors, St Nicholas came to the very same conclusion. In his poem 'Upon Perusal of My Ancient Evidences' (1665–1666), he described such biographical accounts as researchers might today,

Dull as these poor old things look, yet
They are transparent organs, fit,
Like optic glasses, to descry
Things far off as if close by.⁷⁵

One could say much the same about his own poetry and the writings of the past in general. After having examined these 'mouldy parchments', St Nicholas then pondered what his own compositions would say about him: 'what though [will the] next age write' about the 'ancient name of St Nich'las'.⁷⁶ I would like to think that this thesis, through its study of his poetry and the writing of scripturalism it employed, has, in some way, answered his question. I would also like to think that my research shares his view

⁷² Qtd. in Michael Rosenblum, 'Swift's "Holyhead Journal" and Circumstantial Talk in Early Modern England', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 30.2 (December 1996), pp. 159-172 (p. 164).

⁷³ I explore this notion in more depth in my article, "'Have a little book in thy Conscience, and write therein': Writing the Puritan Conscience, 1600–1650", in *Sin and Salvation*, ed. by Willis, pp. 245-258.

⁷⁴ Margaret J. M. Ezell, 'The Posthumous Publication of Women's Manuscripts and the History of Authorship', in *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550–1800*, ed. by George Justice and Nathan Tinker (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), pp. 121-136 (p. 128).

⁷⁵ Thomas St Nicholas, 'Upon Perusal of My Ancient Evidences' (1665–1666), lines 25-28, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 126. This was a reference to Job 36.24-25, 'Remember that thou magnify his work, which men behold. Every man may see it; man may behold it afar off'.

⁷⁶ St Nicholas, 'Upon Perusal of My Ancient Evidences' (1665–1666), lines 3, 101-102, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 126, p. 128.

of the importance of preserving such texts for succeeding generations. As he stated of these 'bits and scraps' of his ancestors',

These wrecks, instead of other treasure,
I, the poor heir, have leave and leisure
To gather up. And pleased I am,
Such as they are, that yet they came
Into my hands. I'll keep them safe...⁷⁷

⁷⁷ St Nicholas, 'Upon Perusal of My Ancient Evidences' (1665–1666), lines 3, 17–21, in *Vacant Hours*, ed. by Davies, p. 126.

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